SIXTY SERMONS

ON PLAIN AND PRACTICAL

SUBJECTS;

BY THE LATE REVEREND

THOMAS PYLE,

MANY YEARS

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CANON RESIDENTIARY

OF THE

CHURCH OF SARUM,

AND AUTHOR OF THE PARAPHRASE

ON THE

ACTS, EPISTLES, AND REVELATION,

IN THE

MANNER OF DR. CLARKE.

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He being Dead yet ſpeaketh.

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SERMON I.

GENESIS, iii. 19.

In the ſweat of thy face ſhalt thou eat bread.

I Imagine with myſelf, there are few perſons, who read theſe words, but are apt to look upon them with a ſorrowful eye; as containing a ſevere ſentence, and a divine judgment, upon the whole life of man, on account of the fall of our firſt parents. They take them to ſignify ſuch a degree of toil, and uneaſy labour, for the ſupport of life, as is ſufficient, in ſome meaſure, to cut off it's beſt pleaſures, and to ſour it's natural enjoyments.

It confirms them in this notion, when they read, in the two foregoing verſes of a *curſe* pronounced upon the very earth itſelf for Adam's ſake. "Curſed is the ground---in

" ſorrow ſhalt thou eat of it---thorns alſo
" and thiſtles ſhall it bring forth unto thee;
" and thou ſhalt eat the herb of the field".

Now all this hard interpretation proceeds from nothing elſe, but a want of attention to the main deſign of the things here ſpoken of, or to the nature of the language they are expreſſed in, and eſpecially to the *whole* of what Moſes has ſaid about the creation and life and fall of man.

To " have, or to get, and to eat bread", means, to procure all the neceſſaries, or conveniencies, of life; food, raiment, houſe, and refreſhments. To get theſe by the " ſweat " of the face", does not neceſſarily imply painful labour, or cruel and uncomfortable drudgery; but only diligent and prudent activity; or a greater degree of labour, both of body and mind, than *ſome others* are wont to exert, or than man in general needed to have exerted, had he remained in innocence, and kept his paradiſe. In like manner as when St. Paul adviſeth chriſtians to " work " out their ſalvation with *fear* and *trembling*"; his meaning is not, that religious duty is a matter of *terror* and *affrightment*, but of manly care, and our beſt induſtry.

Again;

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Again; when it is ſaid, "the ground was "curſed for Adam's ſake"; let us obſerve *what ground* it was; not the *whole earth*; God forbid! for God *bleſſed* the earth exceedingly, and continued the ſame bleſſings to it until the flood, which came upon it for new wickedneſſes; and again repeated them, after the flood was taken off. But the *ground* was the ground of *Paradiſe*; that garden of pleaſure, which God had bleſt and adorned in a *peculiar* manner. *That* was now *curſed* ---not *rendered waſte*, and quite unfruitful, in the ſtrict ſenſe of a curſe; but theſe are *comparative* expreſſions, in which that language abounds. Thus, though angels excel in wiſdom; and the heavens the ſeat of God's habitation, are moſt glorious; yet ſo infinitely ſhort are they of the *divine* wiſdom and the divine purity, that God is ſaid to "charge "his angels with folly", and "the heavens "are not clean in his ſight". So of this ground; it was *curſed*; implying no more, than that it was *leſs bleſſed* than before---it was deprived of all it's uncommon beauties, and ſpontaneous fruitfulneſs---it was levelled with the *common* ground, and laid open to the reſt of the earth; but ſtill it retained it's *na-*

tural and *general* virtues. For, as far as *we* can learn of it, the place where this garden grew, continued through all ages a moſt fertile and wholeſome country.

The next words, "in ſorrow ſhalt thou "eat of it", if they be meant of the ſame ſpot of ground, can denote only thus much; --that if Adam, or any of his poſterity, came again to inhabit that place, they ſhould find it, in compariſon with what it *had been*, a *ſorrowful* abode; ſtript of all it's paradiſe-glories, and reduced to the ſtandard of the other parts of the earth; whoſe fruits though exceeding good in their kinds both for the uſe and delight of man, were not to be reaped without ſo much pains and cultivation and labour, as, conſidering how little was required in *paradiſe*, might be called *trouble* and *ſorrow*.

Moreover; when this bleſſed ground was thrown open to the common land; it might well partake of it's common *qualities*, and "bring forth thorns and thiſtles". This was indeed a diſhonour, a ſort of *curſe* upon *paradiſe*; there was no occaſion for them *there*; but, as to the reſt of the earth prepared by wiſe and good providence for the habitation,

of Adam's deſcendants, they are no curſe at all. *They*, and every thing elſe we ſee around us, from the "cedar of Lebanon to the hyſ-"ſop that groweth upon the wall", from the nobleſt fruit in the field or garden to the meaneſt ſhrub that is to be ſeen, have all ſome admirable purpoſe or other, are all uſeful in their place, and verify the words of the royal Pſalmiſt, that this earth of our's, with all the *curſe* ſome men have dreamt of, is "full of the riches and goodneſs of the "Lord"!

Once more; when God told our firſt parent, that he, and all that came from him, ſhould "eat the herb of the field"; the plain ſenſe was, that inſtead of the ſingular and extraordinary delights of paradiſe, he muſt *now* live upon the products of the ordinary ground, and take pains for them too. But then they were to be very much worth his pains: the pleaſure they would yield, would be his ſufficient recompence. It was not a ſlender and ſcanty proviſion, the good Creator had left for *him*, and *us*. No! the table of *preſent* nature is fully and finely ſpread; the neceſſaries of life lie open in great abun-

dance, and even the dainties and delicacies of it are almoſt innumerable! Yet ſtill, comparatively with *Paradiſe*, the earth, in this figurative ſtile, may be ſaid to be *curſed*.

Farther yet; when the Pſalmiſt had been reckoning up all the exquiſite furniture of this our globe, in the ſtate it *now* is in; and then obſerves that, in order to enjoy the bleſſings of it, man is ſeen to "go forth to his "work, and to his labour";---he does not mention this laſt article as any derogation from the goodneſs of God, or the leaſt hardſhip upon mankind; but, quite the reverſe, as the higheſt inſtance of the divine wiſdom towards us.--- "O Lord", ſays he, "how "manifold are thy works! In wiſdom haſt "thou made them all! The earth is full of "thy riches"! Plainly intending, that, according to the ſenſe of the very text I have been clearing up, "the ſupreme governor "has conſulted the true nature, the proper "intereſt, and the real pleaſure of man, by "ſo ordering things, that, in the general at "leaſt, the neceſſaries and comforts of his "preſent life are to be attained by due la"bour, induſtry, and activity".

My

My deſign, in what follows, is to illuſtrate this great truth.

I. From the account which the holy ſcripture gives us of the life of mankind.

II. From our own nature, from the reaſon and conſtant experience of the thing itſelf.

When man was firſt ſent out of paradiſe into the wide world, to manage the products of it for his ſupport and comfort; his ſkill and manner of doing it, was doubtleſs narrow and imperfect. Providence had furniſhed the earth with a vaſt variety of conveniencies, and man with ſuitable faculties to find them out, and to enjoy them. But this was to be a work of *time*; and his enjoyments were gradually to riſe with his induſtry and application. However, the abſolute *neceſſaries* for preſerving and carrying on life, were ready at his hand; and the labour required for them was very tolerable; and a proportional pleaſure always rewarded his firſt pains.

In the point of *cloathing for the body*, you read that "the Lord God made coats of "ſkin, and cloathed them". It is probable, or poſſible at leaſt, that God might immediately direct the yet unexperienced creatures

to this needful ſupply of their immediate want: but the words do not abſolutely carry that meaning. For as *we*, at this time, very rightly ſay, it is *God* who gives us our daily *bread*, and beſtows *cloathing* upon us, as he does upon the lilies of the field; while yet our own hands muſt manufacture them, and without our own induſtry we ſhould ſtill want them;--ſo it is uſual with the *ſacred language* to aſcribe every thing to *God*, only as the original author of all the *faculties* whereby his creatures attain and enjoy any thing. And thus *God* provided the ſkins, though *Adam himſelf* perhaps might obſerve, and find out, the *uſe* of them.

In proceſs of time, obſervations and inventions increaſed, and arts and ſciences ripened ſo faſt, as to cut the labours of men ſhorter in many neceſſary articles: and though they were multiplied in many others, yet conveniences and freſh enjoyments were multiplied along with them.

And thus our firſt parents drew out a life of very great length, without any ſuch toils, as would wear them out, or bring them to an early decay. Soon after *they* were gone, we read a very remarkable paſſage in the life of

Noah. His father foretold, at his birth, that he would be a great genius, in the diſcovery of arts and methods to make *huſbandry* ſtill more light and eaſy to mankind. So he gave him a name, anſwering to his character: for *Noah* properly denotes *eaſe*, *reſt*, and *refreſhment*. "This ſame" (man) "ſhall com-"fort us concerning our work, and toil of "our hands, *becauſe of the ground* which the "Lord hath curſed". Accordingly, in the ninth chapter, you read of one of his improvements after the flood; namely, that of finding out the method of making *wine*. But this, we ought to think, was only *one* out of a *great many* of his inventions towards heightening the enjoyment of life.

And thus, for many ages, did the virtuous part of mankind paſs their days in an agreeable mixture of labours and pleaſures; in ways and employments moſt uſeful and natural; in the delightful arts of huſbandry; in the toils of ſowing and planting, ſweetly rewarded with the returns of reaping what they ſowed, and taſting the fruits of their labour; in the care of cattle, and plentifully feeding both upon the fleſh and the milk of the flocks;---an employment that the greateſt

eſt men rather gloried in, than were aſhamed of; that made kings themſelves happy, while it was carried on with induſtry and temperance.

But as ſoon as ever plenty produced pride, and arts and ſciences were improved into avarice and extravagance; when the luſt of power and dominion broke in upon right and property, and diſcouraged honeſt induſtry; then men got to be rich, on purpoſe to be idle; and even choſe to be miſerable, rather than not be great. The ſubjects ſoon followed the example of their princes. Plenty and idleneſs, met together, were quickly attended by all the black train that is conſequent upon luxury; ſickneſs, pains, ſurfeits, and diſeaſes; that phyſicians themſelves have hardly names for half of them. Thus came in ambition, and wars, and robberies; and all the violence of the guilty, upon the innocent and peaceable. So, while ſome left off all moderate labour, others muſt needs either have too much of it, or live in *want*. In this manner life was gradually ſhortened, by breaking our original conſtitution, and 'ſpoiling (as we ſay) the very *breed* 'of mankind': and from the comfortable

days

days of many hundreds, and almoſt a thouſand years of temperate induſtry, we ſee ourſelves reduced to the poor ſtandard of our "threeſcore years and ten". And though ſome of us, either by particular prudence or particular ſtrength may drag on to *fourſcore*; yet it ſeldom is a matter of much boaſting: for it generally proves but "a ſtrength of "labour and ſorrow---it ſoon paſſes away, "and we are gone".

Thus far I think it clear, in point of ſcripture, that neither the pains nor the ſhortneſs of human life were the original deſign of good providence, but are the offspring of mens own wilful folly and vice. Labour and induſtry were adapted by almighty God, both to ſweeten and to prolong it.

Let us now ſee how this matter ſtands in our very *nature*, and according to our reaſon, and conſtant experience.

II. Man is an excellent compound of mind and body. His actions, and all their conſequences, are influenced either by his reaſon, or his paſſions. Between the body and mind there muſt be a certain balance and harmony preſerved; or elſe both will ſuffer

in

in their powers and operations. If reaſon guides and moderates the paſſions, the latter are noble aſſiſtants to the former, and the whole man is in his natural, eaſy, and pleaſing ſtate. The contrary produces that confuſion, which is always attended with deformity and ſelf-diſlike.

There are therefore theſe three things, that ought to be the principal aim of ſuch a creature;---*virtue*, *health*, and *pleaſure*: and try whether the good Creator has not conſulted them all, by putting us into a life of buſineſs and labour.

1. As to *virtue*, I may venture to call induſtry her ſafeſt guard and ſecurity. Our minds are of a moſt active and reſtleſs temper; they muſt have ſomething or other to work upon. If they be not fed with what is innocent and good, they fall into evil unavoidably. Study and contemplation are the remedy of but a few: the far major part have *other* employments as their conſtant preſervative againſt vice. Proper labour is a perpetual entertainment: it diverts us from a thouſand objects of vanity, and hurtful amuſement; keeps all the paſſions regular

and

and calm; and curbs the wanton ſallies of our wiſhes and imaginations. Even the richeſt man alive, is in continual danger without buſineſs; and, though he may not do miſchief to *others*, he will hardly fail of doing a great deal to *himſelf*. But the common and moſt certain danger of idleneſs, is the *want* it reduces men to. For it naturally leads to poverty; which, *as* naturally, ends in the loſs of all virtue and conſcience. Many a man, indeed, will keep up a tenderneſs to human nature for ſome conſiderable time; and will do his neighbours no *harm*, while he does neither himſelf not *them* any *good*. And it is not often, that men will invade the rights of others, till by folly and profuſeneſs they have ſquandered away all that was *their own*. But *then* their call becomes loud; neceſſities are preſſing; and there is hardly any truſting to a man's conſcience towards his neighbour, when he has loſt all prudence, and regard for *himſelf!*

In one word; the *induſtrious* poor man may very fairly be ſuppoſed to be punctually honeſt; but no man can be an idle beggarly ſpendthrift, without firſt loſing all manly ſenſe of decency and duty.

2. God

2. God has conſulted the health of the body, by putting us into a life of labour and activity.

They who ſtudy the frame of an human body, though a perfect knowledge of this wonderful work of God is never to be attained, yet thus much they find for certain; that it conſiſts of nerves and veſſels, marvellouſly wrought and placed, the uſe of which, for carrying on life and health, depends upon a certain *tone* and *ſpring*, that is to be preſerved and kept in order by various means, but by none ſo effectually, or ſo conſtantly, as by action and exerciſe. Digeſtion of food, ſecretion of humours, fine ſpirits, good blood, and even good nature itſelf, all depend upon it. Sloth, and lazy reſt, relaxes every fibre, and unfits us for the functions of healthy life; as muſical inſtruments, or the bow, are uſeleſs, when you unbrace the ſtrings. Proper labour does quite the contrary; puts all parts upon their duty; works our food into pure nouriſhment; and makes the ſoul chearful, by rendering the body vigorous and lively. No other witneſſes are wanted for this, than the ruddy looks, the ſtrong hands, the briſk appetites, the ſweet ſleep, of the

buſy,

buſy, and the working man; and the pale faces, the dejected if not melancholy ſpirits, the ſickly ſtomachs, the reſtleſs days and nights of the indolent, the luſtful, and the debauched part of the world.

3. Therefore laſtly; providence has bleſt the diligent man's life with the trueſt *pleaſure*. To have the ſatisfaction of knowing that your minds and hands are employed in the way, and purſuant to the purpoſes, of God and nature; to reflect that you ſpend your time accountably; are ſerviceable to yourſelves and others; help to maintain creatures of God's own creating, nay help to ſupport the community you belong to; (for what is a prince, or a court, or a nation, without working hands, as well as working heads?) all theſe are matter of ſolid comfort, and give a man not only genuine pleaſure, but a reliſh of *honour* too. For, as nothing is ſo ſweet to a good perſon, as what is the fruit of his own labour; ſo, among all the characters and titles the world is ſo fond of, the name of an *induſtrious man* is never denied *it's* value by any rank of people. And were you to enter into a compariſon between the reputable merchant, the ingenious artificer,

cer, the diligent tradeſman, nay the loweſt labourer in the field, and the mere gentleman of far larger fortunes, with nothing but ſports in his head, and diverſions in his heart, and all his time a burden upon his hands; you would not ſtand long (in your ſober thoughts) before you determined, which of the two does moſt ſervice to his country, and moſt honour to his God.

I could here purſue abundance more ſuch premiſes as theſe; but the time draws me to a ſhort concluſion.

And, 1. From all that has been ſaid, let every one ſtrive to ſuppreſs the *love of idleneſs*, as the worſt temper that can befall, or plague the world. Let each man ſhun it, as his bane and ruin; as the bait that draws him into every vice, and will be the death of every commendable and generous principle in him. Let them that are in *power*, perſecute and baniſh it, and all that practiſe and promote it, as that univerſal poiſon, which has always tainted private men, corrupted families, and deſtroyed all the governments upon earth.

2. Then, let no perſon of lower ſtation, any longer entertain a mean opinion, or any diſcontented

diſcontented notion, of *his* life of labour. It is the life of nature's own concerting, and of God's own appointing; for the preſent good of mankind, in order to their future happineſs. It has the cleareſt reaſon, the moſt excellent examples, and the beſt divine hiſtory, to ſpeak it's praiſes. And though it may perhaps be the lot of *ſome*, to have too large a ſhare of the *harder* part of it; yet be not diſcouraged! but remember, this hardſhip of labour proceeds not from the abſolute intention of providence, but from the vices of the world you live in; and that a day is coming, wherein all your work, and patience, and reſignation, ſhall meet their full reward; and you will have no cauſe to repine, that "in "the ſweat of your face you have eaten your "bread".

To God only wiſe.---

SERMON II.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 8.

Whatsoever things are lovely---think on these things.

THIS is one of those epistles of St. Paul, wherein, upon the whole, he had a goodnatured set of men to deal with. Though, in the second and third chapters, you find there had been some amongst them, that had been raising disputes, and sowing the seeds of division; not in really essential matters, but, which is the common case of religious controversy, in imaginary ones;--- "about jewish circumcision and ceremonies; "and how far they were abrogated, or still "in force; or whether they were to be im- "posed upon the gentile christians, or a man "could be a christian without them".

To put an end to ſuch debates, or at leaſt to prevent the evil that might ariſe from them, the apoſtle adviſes both ſides to come to a proper temper: "let nothing be done "through ſtrife, or vain glory; but, in low- "lineſs of mind, let each eſteem others bet- "ter than themſelves. Look not every man "on his own things", on his own opinions, on his own arguments and perſuaſions, "but "alſo on the things of others. Let this "mind be in *you*, which was alſo in Chriſt "Jeſus". Thus, *whenever* any enquiries or controverſies be ſet on foot, even about *fundamentals*; let but a chriſtian ſpirit moderate and guide them, and they will both begin and end in that "peace of God which paſ- "ſeth all underſtanding".

But, as the beſt remedy, either to divert men from engaging in ſuch matters at all, or elſe to ſecure their conduct under them: he *here* recommends to their moſt careful regard, a ſummary of the high and important duties of religion; ſuch, in particular, as have a natural tendency to exalt our minds, and enoble our ſpirits; that cannot fail to give a luſtre to chriſtianity, and endear the perſons of all that ſincerely profeſs it.

He

He begins with a peculiar emphaſis, placing at the head, "whatſoever things are true"--that we take up our religion from the ſenſe and conviction we have of it's *truth*; and form all our notions in it, with a conſcientious regard to the reaſon and evidence of things.

"Whatſoever things are *honeſt*"--it ſhould be tranſlated "whatſoever things "are *ſeemly* "and *venerable*"---that our carriage in the world be attended with that *comelineſs* and *gravity*, which is wont to attract the reverence of mankind.

"Whatſoever things are juſt, and pure"--that we be not only ſtrictly fair and juſt, but tender and generous, in our dealings with *men*; and careful of all that integrity of heart, and innocency of life, that may render us acceptable to *God*.

Finally, "whatſoever things are lovely"--that we aſpire to that degree, to thoſe inſtances, of religion, that are the fruits of refined morals, and of truly ingenuous minds; that will draw after them, not a popular applauſe, or the giddy praiſes of the multitude; but will command an eſteem, and win men over

to imitation, by the ſhining virtue and excellency of the things themſelves.

Theſe *laſt named* articles are what I would *now* more particularly deſcribe, and recommend to you. And this I would do, as they have reſpect,

I. To God;

II. To our neighbour; and,

III. To ourſelves.

And, I. Let me obſerve, what we are to aim at, as agreeable and lovely in our religion, as it may immediately relate to almighty God; either in our *ſentiments* of him, of his divine will, providence, and commands; or in our *worſhip* of him. In the former, it ſhould be our eſpecial care, to frame all our apprehenſions of the ſupreme being, by the plaineſt maxims, and the cleareſt ideas we have of his divine perfections; and to carry forward all our reaſonings, and to bound every concluſion concerning his diſpenſations towards us, by the evident expreſſes he has given us of his nature and will. And ſure I am, that, whatever wild and unaccountable things *ſome men* may have ſaid about God; yet whatever God has been pleaſed to declare of *himſelf*, either by the light of our own uncorrupted reaſon, or by the word of his re-

velation, is all clear, uniform, and conſiſtent; terminating in nothing more nor leſs, than in the amiable character of "one infinite, "all-perfect Creator, one ſupremely wiſe, "good, powerful, and impartial Lord and "Governor over *us*, and all his rational crea-"tures".

We are, in the next place, to ſeek what is lovely, and to avoid whatever is wrong and deformed, in our *devotion* and *worſhip* of God. And here the proper marks of diſtinction, which raiſe the truly pious, above the ſuper-ſtitious, or hypocritical worſhipper, are the circumſtances accompanying, and the good diſpoſitions of ſoul that produce, theſe out-ward expreſſions of reverence. I will juſt point out to you, one or two of them.---Let your worſhip always follow, and keep pace with, the ſerious and deliberate thoughts you have of God; and let your devotion be the reſult of a right underſtanding, and a pure conviction of your *duty*. This will keep it calm, and make it a rational ſervice;---the homage of a mind, ſenſible, and well cul-tivated.

Again; that our devotion may be pleaſing to God, or lovely in the eyes of men; it

ſhould be *unaffected*; free, as much as can be, from all that noiſe, and outſide ſhew, which gives one the diſguſtful idea of the formaliſt, and the hypocrite. Worſhip is certainly the graveſt thing in the world; the life and ſpirit of it ever lies within. When the outward part is overacted, and continually preſſing to be obſerved; all the graces of it are loſt, or look thick and glaring. And the man is exactly like an unſkilful painter, who delights in nothing but drapery; and drowns all the true reſemblance, and the native beauty, in bold and ill-choſen colours. Affectation in this caſe (as foppery in dreſs) diſcovers itſelf to an ordinary eye, by the ſuperfluous ornaments wherewith it abounds.

Laſtly; to give devotion it's beſt grace, it ought always to be performed with modeſty, goodnature and candour towards all men.

The ſincere worſhipper has nothing proud, or ſour in him---never comes to his Maker, full of himſelf; to "thank God that he is "not as *other* men are": but *firſt* looks into himſelf; and *then* wiſhes well to, and heartily hopes the beſt of, all his fellow creatures. For in ſhort, they that arrogate to themſelves

themſelves the only acceptable way of worſhipping God, have too often the leaſt of that *ſpirit* and *truth*, without which no ſacrifice can be well pleaſing to him. Our completeſt ſervices are ſo ſhort of perfection, that all the luſtre we can give them, muſt ſpring from the humility and charity that goes along with them.

II. The ſecond branch of religious actions, wherein we are to endeavour after thoſe peculiar qualities, by which they become amiable and exemplary, belongs to our behaviour towards *one another*. And theſe I ſhall reduce to the two heads of juſtice, and benevolence.

Juſtice, or a ſtrict regard to truth and right in all tranſactions between man and man, has ſo apparent a connection with the peace and ſafety of human life, that the very neceſſity of it, and the immediate intereſt every perſon has in it, is *ſome* tie upon him to practiſe it. And the obſervance of it from a mere ſenſe of this *neceſſity*, carries in it *a degree* of virtue. But the perfect honour and generoſity of being punctually honeſt is ſeen, where a man has all the advantages of *ſecrecy*, and all the temptation of an unjuſt gain conſiſtent with

with an unbroken character, and an entire reputation:---when, without the poſſibility of a *diſcovery*, and with all the good grace imaginable, you have an opportunity of impoſing upon other mens ignorance and innocence, and ſafely carrying off the ſpoil! *Then*, I ſay, to be as vigilant in doing right to a neighbour, to a ſtranger, as if a thouſand eyes were upon you; to abhor the private fraud, as much as you would the public ſcandal of it; to put the intereſt of another upon the level with your own, out of love to him as your own image, and out of reverence to him as the image of God;---*this* is abſolute *piety*, as well as juſtice---it is *religion*, in her genuine colours, in her own moſt lovely character!

Benevolence and charity have a large field to act in, and are big with a noble variety of virtues: and every one of theſe again, is attended with ſome particular circumſtances, proper to ſeaſons and perſons, that give it uncommon dignity and worth. To be doing *ſome* good turns to each other, is neceſſary and unavoidable: there is no living, no ſubſiſting, without it. But what the *text* recommends to *chriſtians* under the title of *lovely*,

are

are kindneſſes that might be *omitted* without infamy, but cannot be *done* without applauſe and admiration even from the worſt of men.

For inſtance. An act of diſintereſted generoſity, clear of all ſelfiſh views, of all deſire, or even poſſibility, of any *return*; love and beneficence ſurmounting perſonal prejudices, and conquering all the biaſs of party notions, nay, differences in religion itſelf (generally the moſt warm and raging of all differences) *this* is a charity of refined and truly chriſtian ſpirits! Our bleſſed Saviour has drawn it out to the life, in that moſt edifying parable of the unfortunate Jew, and the merciful Samaritan. There you behold a miſerable perſon, robbed, and ſpoiled, and half dead of his wounds; left, by his own countrymen, to lie weltring in his blood, without any eye of help or pity. Nay, the prieſt and the Levite, the men whoſe ſacred function ſhould have inſpired them with the tendereſt ſentiments of humanity; even *they* could ſee the doleful object without relenting, and "paſſed "by on the other ſide." But the Samaritan, a ſtranger, and an *enemy*, when *he* ſaw him, could not ſhut up his bowels of mercy againſt a man, whom his whole church called an *Heretick*,

retick. He poured oil into his wounds; bound them up; ſet him on his own beaſt; ſpent his time, his money, and his credit, upon a helpleſs creature, whom he was morally certain never to ſee or hear of more.

Thus there may be, there often is, the ſublimeſt virtue, where *ſome* men conclude there can be no virtue at all!

The ſcriptures give us another inſtance, of the kindneſs of Jonathan to David---to a man, whom the king his father had warned him of, as a competitor for the ſucceſſion of the crown---to a man that, he was told, ſtood in his light; and if he were not taken off, would deprive him of the greateſt honour the world could afford. But David's innocence, and good qualities, left no room for Jonathan's envy: the friendſhip was built upon that inviolable bottom! and "he did "kindneſs to David; for he loved him as his "own ſoul".

Again; our bleſſed Maſter tells us of a way of doing good where the "left hand knoweth not what the right hand doth". Without queſtion, the modeſt ſecreſy of ſome generous actions, brightens and exalts their merit, as much as an affected *applauſe* muſt tarniſh

tarniſh and ſpoil it. Thoſe beneficent ſpirits, who induſtriouſly take care never to have their names ſounded or known for the beſt actions, muſt do the good for the ſake of *goodneſs*. They make it a real thing, and not a *name* only: they make worth and honour to be ſubſtantial, and not the mere products of will and fancy; to be as truly themſelves, when acting by themſelves and unſeen, as when ſeen and applauded by the whole world. And muſt it not be an amiable oblation, in the eyes of God; when, avoiding that glory which is ſo tempting among *men*, we refer all to that "Father who ſeeth in ſecret"?

Once more; there is no piece of *charity* which, in it's circumſtances, is capable of being more affecting, and ſurpriſingly beautiful, than that of *forgiving injuries*. It is a conqueſt over the moſt powerful paſſions we have, and ſhews good nature wrought up to it's higheſt purity, and brought to it's laſt refinement and perfection. It gives you, at one view, the glorious art of melting down your adverſary, and of commanding yourſelf. I believe there is not an example in all the hiſtories of the world, diſplayed

with

with ſo much ſtrength and ſimplicity, as that of Joſeph and his brethren in the book of Moſes. There you have a man, whoſe ſuperior virtues made him the mark of envy to his own brethren. If nature had not ſtrongly pleaded in his behalf, they had forthwith became his bloody executioners. They could hardly be prevailed upon, to content themſelves with ſelling him for a *ſlave!* In that ſtate he paſſes through a variety of trials, till a courſe of ſteady wiſdom and virtue raiſed him to the height of grandeur, and made him governor over all Egypt. Thither were theſe inhuman brothers forced to come, bending and proſtrate, for the common neceſſaries of life, at the feet of the man they had ſo cruelly treated. Oh! what an advantage was here for a man of power, dazzled with authority and fired with reſentment, to ſtrike terror into the hearts of ſuch captives and offenders! They expected no leſs! They were ſpeechleſs at the ſight of him! and "were troubled at his preſence"! But revenge is not the glory of great minds. Joſeph recovers them from all their apprehenſions, by looks and ſpeeches full of compaſſion

paſſion. "Come near to me, I pray you; "I am your brother: be not grieved, that "ye ſold me hither". He would not ſuffer them to caſt an eye inward upon their *own guilt*, but turned all their attention to the merciful *hand of providence* in the direction of the whole affair. "Be not angry with "yourſelves: it was not *you* that ſent me "hither, but *God*". No man can read ſuch a narrative as this, or view ſo lovely a picture, without being warmed and lifted in his inclinations toward ſomething above the common conduct of human life!

To theſe I might add ſeveral other diſpoſitions, that partake of this ſuperlative excellency, whereof I am now ſpeaking; ſuch as rejoicing at the welfare of others, wherein we ourſelves can have no ſhare, nor be in the leaſt concerned. Men of ſome tempers (but they muſt be very depraved ones) feel as if they were hurt and degraded, in proportion as they ſee another advanced. Whereas a manly ſpirit is full of love to all that bear the form of *man*; is not meanly circumſcribed within itſelf, but takes delight in ſeeing others delighted; draws pleaſure to itſelf from every inſtance of divine goodneſs to all around

around it, and adds comfort to ſuch as obſerve it's generous complacency in their proſperity.

So again; to be communicative, frank, and open in imparting our ſentiments, and informing others by our converſation, may well paſs for one of theſe *lovely* qualities. A moroſe ſilence, and a ſour reſervedneſs, may ſometimes dwell with large abilities; but can be no ornament to them. The knowledge of a liberal mind, is free and diffuſive; ſtrives to be uſeful, by ſpreading itſelf; and, by being uſeful, becomes truly admirable.

III. I come now to the laſt rank of religious concerns;---ſuch as have immediate relation to *ourſelves*; and which, in general, may be ſaid to conſiſt in ſuch a ſedateneſs and compoſure of mind, by the good government of our paſſions, and a prudent command of our appetites and inclinations, as will beſt carry us forward in the conduct of the whole rational, religious, and ſocial life.

Thoſe perſons who are ſo circumſtanced, as to meet with little fewel to inflame deſire, few ſtrong temptations, or enticing opportunities of indulging the "pride of life",

or

or the pleaſures of ſenſe, are certainly to be commended, if they contentedly keep within the compaſs allotted them by providence. They are virtuous, if they do not follow after, and ſeek up, temptations to vice.

Still, however, it muſt be confeſſed, that ſplendid virtue is properly ſeen, not in the avoiding, but in the *reſiſting*, the allurements of ſin. Thus, whenever you behold a man ſurrounded with the choiceſt gifts of fortune, with plenty of every thing that can adminiſter to each fleſhly deſire, and yet truly moderate in the enjoyment of them all;---or one that, with the fineſt parts and accompliſhments, carries it humbly to the meaneſt, and is courteous even to thoſe that are leaſt qualified;---or if you ſee the man of power, ſtooping where he might look big and domineer, gentle and condeſcending to thoſe he might controul with a frown, and terrify with a word;---or, to name no more, whenever you view the great heart, that ſtifles it's anger where it could let it looſe with the moſt dreadful advantage, and with inviolable patience ſuffers under, and prays for, the hand that perſecutes it.---Here, I ſay, you behold a ſight *lovely* indeed!---human nature riſing

up again to it's original dignity, and reſuming that *image of God*, after which it was at firſt created.

And having thus briefly deſcribed the things which the apoſtle here calls *lovely*, or more engaging inſtances of religious behaviour; I ſhall conclude with recommending them to your ſerious thoughts and practice.

"Think on theſe things": look upon them as the nobleſt end of religion, and the nobleſt improvement that can be made of it. Let them be eſteemed as the characteriſtics of your chriſtianity, as the moſt perfect way of ſerving God, and being beloved by all rational men. And, if you had no other argument, let this be a ſafe concluſion--- that, "that muſt be the pureſt religion, which "teaches the beſt things".

Again! "think on theſe things", as more obligatory on chriſtians, than on any other men; ſince they are not only injoined in the precepts, but have been exemplified, and brought into life, in the actions and ſufferings, of our dear and bleſſed Maſter. In whom we have an entire draught of that ſolid and unaffected piety to God, that tenderneſs and goodneſs to men, and that unſpotted purity and

greatneſs

greatneſs of mind, ſo far ſurpaſſing what all the wiſdom of *philoſophy* either taught or practiſed.

To ſum up the whole; "think on theſe "things", as more uſeful, more neceſſary, more ornamental, than all others--that while learning may beget pride, and diſputes may blow up our paſſions, and zeal raging in * party againſt party may expoſe our whole profeſſion to the prejudices and ſcorn of unbelievers; theſe diſpoſitions of undefiled and chriſtian virtue, will be ſure to raiſe it's reputation, and convert all it's enemies into friends. Theſe are the things, that will dwell in you, and continue with you. They are the ſeeds of the ſpiritual and heavenly life, ſown in you by the wiſe God in this ſtate of your diſcipline and probation. And if you will ſuffer them to take root, they will not leave you, nor die and periſh in the grave with you; but, immortal as the ſoul to which they belong, will follow it through all the modes of it's exiſtence, and be it's ſource of happineſs to all eternity.

To God only wiſe.---

* The reader is deſired to take notice, that many of theſe ſermons were preached at a time when religious controverſy ran very high.

SERMON III.

JAMES i. 13.

Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

SUCH is the nature of man, and of every reaſonable being, that it is hardly poſſible, even for the moſt depraved amongſt them, to eraſe from their minds all ſenſe of the beauty and obligations of virtue, or of the deformity and evil of vice. There is a wiſe and dutiful behaviour, adapted to the ſeveral ſtations and characters of men, that has a luſtre in it, which ſtrikes the eyes of the worſt of mortals: while, on the other hand, there is a baſeneſs in the oppoſite conduct, attended with a remorſe that purſues them into the cloſeſt retirement, and will one day find entrance into the moſt hardened conſcience.

What I now ſay, appears evident, from the deſire that moſt if not all wicked men diſcover, of throwing off the *blame* and guilt of their vices, and laying it upon any thing rather than *themſelves*. They indulge pleaſures, which they bluſh to confeſs are their own free and deliberate choiee. They fooliſhly run into the effects, but would have ſomething elſe, not *themſelves*, to be the proper cauſe.

Here then is a plain argument, that every vicious practice has ſomething in it's nature odious and diſtaſteful; ſince it's very patrons are aſhamed to call it their own. Why elſe do they ſeek for any excuſes? Why ſhould an habitual ſinner be at any pains to find a covering for his ſins; or try to varniſh over the follies, he does not pretend to *juſtify?* Why is the action committed, and then the *fault* (for a fault there muſt be *ſomewhere*) aſcribed to temptation--temptation from natural conſtitution; or from bad company; or from the Devil; or from buſineſs; or ſingular difficulties, and hard circumſtances of life?

St. James had all theſe pretences of ſinners in his eye, when he gave his chriſtians this ſolemn leſſon of caution. And probably he had

had in his more immediate view, a caſe peculiarly frequent in thoſe firſt ages of the goſpel; namely, the caſe of "perſecution "for the ſake of chriſtianity": under which he might obſerve *ſome* perſons to ſhrink, and behave cowardly, ſo as to renounce their profeſſion for fear of farther ſufferings; and then to plead, that the "trial was too ſevere, and "that God and his providence inflicted up-"on them more than man is able to bear".

Now this, and all other excuſes, the apoſtle commands both *them* and *us* by no means to make uſe of, or rely upon; as they *all* carry in them, this terrible and blaſphemous conſequence; that "we are charging "the juſt and righteous God with the wilful "ſins of men." "Let no man ſay" (even though he be tempted by *perſecution*, and ſuffering for *conſcience ſake*; much leſs if it be by any *ſmaller* trial of his patience and virtue) "let him not ſay, I am tempted of "*God*. For God cannot be tempted with "evil, neither tempteth he any man". The force of which words will be ſeen, and felt too I hope, when I ſhall have conſidered and explained theſe ſeveral things.

I. In what ſenſe either God or men may be ſaid to tempt others, and be tempted themſelves; or may be denied to be liable to one or the other.

II. When, and in what inſtances, any man is properly guilty of attributing his temptations and ſins to God.

III. What unreaſonableneſs and folly men betray in ſo doing, for the two reaſons given in the text: firſt, that God cannot himſelf be tempted with evil: ſecondly, that therefore he can never be ſuppoſed, in *that* manner, to tempt any of his creatures.

I. To *tempt*, and be *tempted*, is uſed in ſcripture both in a good and a bad, in an innocent and a miſchievous ſenſe. The prime notion of the word is to *make trial* of the mind, or behaviour of any perſon; either for diſcovering what diſpoſition he is of, and how he will act in any particular caſe; or to ſet forth his conduct, as exemplary and inſtructive to other men. Thus we make experiment of the prudence and kindneſs of our friend, or our neighbour: the prince tries the loyalty of his ſubjects, the commander the ſpirit and bravery of his ſoldiers, or the

ſtrength

ſtrength and policy of his enemy. In this *good* acceptation, it cannot be denied that Almighty God often *tempts* his reaſonable creatures, and puts them upon the exerciſe of their fidelity and obedience. He tries the hearts of the beſt of men, by the harder taſk of ſufferings and afflictions; that they may ſhine as lights in the world, for the imitation of others, and for promoting the practice of virtue; and at the ſame time to raiſe the honour of their own character, and to heighten their glory and reward. Thus you read, that God "*tempted* Abraham": and he tempted the children of Iſrael, to *try* them, and to "*prove* them, whether they would keep his "commandments or no". And, of the more eminently virtuous men, he ſays in the prophet, "I will bring them through the fire, "and will *try* them as gold is tried". And again; "many ſhall be purified, and made "white, and *tried*". God *tries* men, not as if he wanted any *information*, or did not perfectly know how every man will act in any given caſe. His trial of us is intended, not for his own ſake, but for our's; to ſtrengthen our fortitude and ſubmiſſion to the divine

will,

will, and render us influential upon all around us.

But when one Being makes attempt upon the paſſions and inclinations of another, with a view of ſeducing it from it's *duty*, and it's *happineſs*; or in order to accompliſh any other injurious and malicious deſign; *this* is a *temptation* proper only to evil minds, and reprobate ſpirits. Such was the devil's temptation of our firſt parents: ſuch was his attempt upon our bleſſed Saviour: and ſuch are all the allurements to luſt and vice, wherewith lewd creatures cruelly labour, and often ſo wickedly rejoice, to corrupt one another.

Again; "to be tempted", in ſcripture, not only ſignifies the *act of trying* a perſon, and that perſon's *undergoing* ſuch a trial; but it frequently expreſſes the *conſequence*, and criminal *effect*, of ſuch a temptation---the *falling into* the vice, to which a man is tempted. Thus St. Paul, in his epiſtle to the Galatians, adviſes the governors of the church to be gentle in their treatment of a chriſtian that had ſinned, "conſidering yourſelves", ſays he, "leſt *ye* alſo be *tempted*", that is,

be

be drawn to *comply with* the like ſinful temptation: 'do not bear too hard', ſays the apoſtle, 'upon the offending brother: remember 'it may poſſibly, ſome time or other, be your own caſe'. So he tells the Theſſalonians, what concern he had been under for them, "leſt the Tempter ſhould have *tempted* them", have *actually drawn* them from the *faith*, and "his labour ſhould be in vain". And when our Lord teaches us to pray, that "God "would not lead us into *temptation*"; his meaning is not, that we are to pray, that 'God would never ſuffer us at all to be 'tempted', but that 'he would aſſiſt us in 'our endeavours not to be *overcome* by any 'temptation'. So in another place, he exhorts us to "watch and pray, that we enter "not into temptation"----not to pray that 'we may eſcape all *poſſible trial of our virtue*', but that 'we may paſs through ſuch trial 'with innocence, and chriſtian reſolution'.

Now in this *laſt ſenſe* of tempting, and *ſinning* by temptation, it is abſolutely denied that "God tempteth any man": that he can directly or indirectly, be the cauſe, either of the thing itſelf, or any of it's conſequences. *He* tries us always for our good: whenever it

is

is turned to *evil*, the fault, moſt undoubtedly is in ourſelves.

II. Well therefore; if the ſupreme fountain of wiſdom, power and happineſs, cannot be ſuppoſed to be the author of any folly, vice, or miſery; if *He* that is of "purer eyes "than to behold iniquity without indignation", can never be imagined to be the patron and promoter of it:----into what heart of man did it, or can it ever enter, to aſcribe his ſins to this original of all goodneſs; and to make God the *cauſe* of what is ſo abhorrent from his divine purity and perfections? In what ways, I ſay, or in what inſtances, are men, and even chriſtians, guilty of ſuch abſurd blaſphemy? This is the queſtion I am *now* to reſolve.

No man alive, I take for granted, who has any ſenſe of religion, or any remaining ideas of good and evil, will dare, in *direct* aſſertion and in *expreſs* words, to charge his vices upon his Maker, and affirm his God to be the parent of his ſins. This is too ſhocking, and too ſhameful! But then how often is it *as effectually* done, by ſuch pretences and excuſes, or by ſuch principles and doctrines, as, though they do not carry the ſame open face,

face, yet muſt really and ultimately *infer*, and *amount to*, the ſame abſurdity? For example---many a vitious man will be ſo ingenuous as to allow his practices to be wrong, and the indulgence of his luſts to be imprudent, and unhappy. He will confeſs that intemperance is conſummate folly, and that to command his paſſions would be a conduct far nobler and wiſer. Well then; what is the ſalve for all his irregularities? To what Mother does he lay this baſe offspring of wickedneſs? Why, truly, nature is frail, and fleſh and blood is to bear the blame. The corruptions we were born withal, it ſeems, are ſo prevalent; that though the religious leſſons given us to rectify and cure them, be fine and admirable in *ſpeculation*; yet to carry theſe leſſons into *practiſe*, is above the powers of a feeble and mortal man. But what are men doing, while they are thus pleading? Can you reflect upon nature, without reflecting upon the great Author of nature? Our frame and conſtitution is none of our own work. We could not make a ſingle hair of our heads, either white or black! No one original paſſion, no one inclination, was implanted in you by any other hand, than that

which

which at first made both soul and body. So that to say, 'we have innate and inbred dispositions to evil, and that all the powers 'of reason and of grace are insufficient to 'make us virtuous and happy', is at once to clear ourselves, and to impeach our good Creator. For there is no difference between asserting, that 'God actually and immediately leads us into evil', and declaring that 'he 'hath so formed us, as that it is impossible 'for us to withstand it's temptations'.

2. Farther; do you not, in the same manner, impute your sins to God, when you would excuse any unjust and fraudulent dealings by the *condition* and *circumstances* of your *lives*? When you plead poverty, or ignorance, in defence of known and barefaced crimes? When your fall from a high and plentiful fortune into low and mean life, is pretended to strike so hard upon a generous spirit, to pierce so deep into the tender and delicate part of nature, as to shock the ablest mind, and justify your impatience and discontent, or the iniquitous methods you may take to regain your former rank and figure? Or when you urge, that some kinds of business and traffic are not to be carried on by the rules of exact justice, conscience, or sobriety? Or again!

when the politician maintains, that national intereſts, and the public affairs of kingdoms, can never proceed upon your "nice maxims "of honour", your "goſpel ſincerity", or "religious veracity"? What, I ſay, does all this reaſoning amount to? Certainly, if theſe things be ſo; He that made and ordered the world, and all the various ſtations and relations we are placed in, has ordered them ſtrangely! For if any vice be inſeparable from, and unavoidable in, any one character, office, or employment; if a breach of moral and religious duty be neceſſary towards a due diſcharge of it;--then, by conſequence, He that is the cauſe of the one, is the cauſe of the other. So that every argument of this kind, brings you at laſt to this concluſion;---that 'ſin and providence are met to-'gether, and the wiſdom of God and the 'vices of men have kiſſed each other'.

3. Try, once more; and ſee whether you do not "ſin with your mouth, and charge "God fooliſhly", when you attribute your own voluntary and deliberate crimes to the influence and temptation of the *devil*. See if it be not one and the ſame thing, to declare, that 'God has never given us the means of 'grace, of virtue, and happineſs'; or to plead,

that, 'having beſtowed them on us, he ſuf-
'fers them to be inevitably taken from us'.
And can you really ſay, and ſeriouſly believe,
that our good Lord has bountifully afforded
us plain rules of life, and a gracious promiſe
of rewards and bleſſings for obeying thoſe
rules; if, at the ſame time, you dare to pre-
tend, that 'he has granted a certain enemy
'of our's full power to ruin all our honeſt
'endeavours, and to deprive us of all the pre-
'cious fruits of them'? In one word; to ſay
that the devil does, or can, ſeduce any man,
againſt the man's free will, and without the
concurrence of his free conſent, is to affirm
that God has made a mock of his own laws,
and of the ſalvation of his creatures--to ſhew
yourſelves the fooliſh ſons of that fooliſh mo-
ther, who ſaid, "the ſerpent beguiled me,
"and I did eat".

4. Laſtly; however harmleſs their deſigns
may be (for I would judge hardly of no man,
for his mere opinions) yet nothing does more
flatly impute the wickedneſs of men to their
Maker, than the ſevere doctrine of an uncon-
ditional and irreverſible predeſtination of
mens happy or miſerable ſtate. For, beyond
all diſpute, he that abſolutely decrees the
damnation of any perſon; and, to make good

that decree, puts him into a ſtate where he *ſhall* ſin, and *cannot but* ſin; demonſtrates the real cauſe of the ſin and miſery, not to be in the unhappy *ſubject* doomed to ſuch a fate, but in *himſelf*, from whoſe arbitrary will this neceſſity proceeded. So then, though I *condemn* no man for thus thinking (provided it be innocently) yet I much *lament* and *pity* him for judging thus wrongly of his God, and of himſelf. The *one only* decree that I know or read of, which God ever made concerning the final ſalvation or reprobation of any man, is this; that "thoſe who are *deſirous* of coming to Chriſt, he will in no wiſe *caſt out*; "and upon none but ſuch as wilfully *refuſe* "to come will he pronounce the ſentence of "*condemnation*".

In fine; God has given to us all, abundant power both to will and to act for our own well-being: and whoever of us falls by the trials and temptations He appoints him to undergo, falls entirely through his neglect and abuſe of that power. To ſet before you the unreaſonableneſs and impiety of all the abovementioned pleas and pretences to the contrary, ſhall be reſerved for the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

To the King eternal.---

SERMON IV.

JAMES i. 13.

Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

I Have gone through the two former parts of what I purpoſed to ſay upon theſe words:---wherein I have ſhewn you what is meant by *temptation*; and in what ſenſe *God* may be ſaid or denied to *tempt* or try any man. I have alſo conſidered in what manner, and in what inſtances men are underſtood to *attribute* their ſins to God, or to his providence. I have allowed that they do this, not *directly*, and in expreſs terms; but yet by ſuch pretences and excuſes, or by ſuch falſe and unſcriptural doctrines, as muſt of neceſſity reflect upon their Creator as the

proper cauſe of their follies and miſconduct. Such are their complaints of the corruption and infirmities of nature; of the difficulties attending their particular ſituation, or the particular buſineſs they are engaged in; the temptation and influence of the *devil*; and the doctrine of arbitrary and unconditional predeſtination. All or any of theſe, I have proved to be ſo many real impeachments of the divine purity, juſtice, and goodneſs, with reſpect to God's diſpenſations and dealings with his rational creatures.

III. The unreaſonableneſs and impiety of which ſeveral pretences, I have reſerved for the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe.

The apoſtle's argument, to evince the abſurdity of the thing in *general*, is ſtrong and indiſputable. "For God", ſays he, "cannot himſelf be *tempted* with evil; and "therefore it is impoſſible he ſhould *tempt* "any of his creatures, with a deſign to *in*-"*jure*, or draw it into evil".

It is a prime notion of God, and level to the meaneſt underſtanding, that 'as he is the 'original of all power, the fountain of all 'wiſdom; ſo muſt he be alſo, of truth and 'rectitude'.

'rectitude'. He that hath, in and from himſelf, all perfection---how can *He* be ſuppoſed to will, or take the leaſt pleaſure in, the deformity of any of his own productions? How can he but delight in the regularity and happineſs of every creature, who is himſelf infinitely wiſe, and good, and happy? Or how can he be conceived to place any Being in a ſtate of inevitable tranſgreſſion and miſery, who is himſelf the all-powerful ſource of excellence and felicity? This, I ſay, is unanſwerable demonſtration, in the *general*; but we muſt ſpeak to the *particular* pleas of a wicked man. Firſt then; "what com-"plaint can we juſtly make, concerning the "corruption, or original defects, of our hu-"man nature and conſtitution"? You alledge (and ſome *teachers* may have delivered it as a part of religious doctrine) that "you "are eſſentially wicked; born in ſin; and "are by *nature*, prone to evil, and chil-"dren of wrath". All which expreſſions, as they have been interpreted from the ſcripture language (which language I ſhall conſider preſently) may ſupply ſome of you with a ſpecious cloak for your ſins, and give others a ſad and uncomfortable proſpect of

the nature and mind of man. But then they muſt, at the ſame time, fill your hearts with a moſt dreadful idea of your *Creator*, the *author* and *framer* of this corrupt nature. And, while you are pleading the one, you cannot but be quite confuted and confounded by the other. So will it ever be with *all* falſe doctrines, and with this above all others: every thinking mind feels itſelf unwilling, and unable, to embrace them!

But let us trace this matter a little farther, from fact, experience, and ſcripture. Has the corruption you ſpeak of (your corruption from *Adam*) deprived you of your noble faculty of reaſon? Does it take away your ſight and diſcernment of the differences of things and actions, of the nature of good and evil? Has it ſo blinded you, that you cannot (though you employ never ſo much attention) diſcover a clear obligation, a clear law, an evident intereſt, a manifeſt pleaſure, in practiſing the one, and avoiding the other? When you are tempted to fulfil a ſinful luſt, to gratify an unlawful paſſion, to do a cruel or ungenerous action; does this corruption and depravity of nature bend you ſo forcibly one way, that you can perceive no principle,

no powers within you, to incline you the contrary way? Has it left you no "candle "of the Lord", to ſhew you light in this dark ſtate; no checks of mind, no remorſe of conſcience, to cool the heat, and reſtrain the violence, of this propenſity to ſin? Alas for you! your very *paſſions* would be your friends, and ſtrongly contend for your good, if you would govern them aright; as much as they hurt and ſeduce you, when you indulge them in what is evil. Tell me, is it poſſible that the ſame *ſelf-love*, and the ſame fear of pain, can teach you to ſhun fire and water, to fly from poiſon and poverty; and yet be unable to affect you with any ſenſe of the dangers of vice, and the terrors of the wrath of heaven, and of future everlaſting deſtruction?

Put the argument in another light.---Has this natural corruption, as you call it, ſtill left your underſtanding clear, and your will free, in *all other* matters? Has it left you able to cultivate the fineſt arts and ſciences, to build and to plant, to govern kingdoms, and to raiſe eſtates and families; and yet, all this while, utterly incapable of knowing your duty to your Maker, of learning his

will, and interpreting his word; of feeling the power of his commands, and the graces of his holy ſpirit? If it has left you all this, be aſſured it has left you all that the wiſe God intended for you in the preſent life, and all that you can in reaſon deſire for yourſelves! It is an excellent nature, that is beſtowed upon you; and you have nothing wanting towards your virtue and happineſs, but to *uſe* it *well*. How fully has the prophet refuted all complaints which the Jews, or any other people could make, againſt God and nature; by ſhewing them what powers they ſtill had (if they would but *exert* them) for their virtuous conduct? "He hath ſhew-"ed thee, O man, what is good. And what "doth the Lord require of thee, but to do "juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly "with thy God".

Well; but *theſe very ſcriptures*, it ſeems, ſpeak of this great corruption, this natural inability in man to become righteous! Judge of them when you are once led into their true and plain ſenſe.

The moſt remarkable paſſages of ſcripture, that appear to look this way, and have been wreſted to this ſtrange meaning, are of two

 ſorts;

ſorts; the one of which intends to ſet forth the *imperfection* of man, the other to deſcribe the power that *habits*, whether good or evil, have over him. Both are uſually conveyed in high figures of language, natural to the hot climate and warm ſpirits of the eaſtern people, but common enough in the ſpeech of all other countries, where they are not at all *miſunderſtood*. Thus, when Job and Solomon would expreſs abſolute innocence, and perfection of life; they term it *cleanneſs*; and when they would ſet forth the frailty and imperfection of human virtue, they had no middle word, no term of lower ſignification, but expreſs it by the quite oppoſite quality, and call it *uncleanneſs*----which means only an inferior degree of purity, or perfection. Thus, when Job acknowledges himſelf to have had his *failings* (from which no man is exempt in this mortal ſtate) "what is man", ſays he "that he ſhould be clean? How can "*he* be clean that is born of a woman? The "very *heavens* are not clean in his *(God's)* "ſight"! that is, no man is completely innocent, *nothing* is abſolutely perfect but God alone. And Solomon, "who can ſay, I have

"made

" made my heart clean, I am pure from my " ſin"? Now theſe texts ſpeak not a ſyllable of natural and innate *corruption*, but of *imperfection* only. They ſpeak no more than the ſenſe of St. *James*, " in many things we offend all"; and of St. *John*, " if we ſay that " we have no ſin, we deceive ourſelves, and " the truth is not in us".

Again; other paſſages diſplay the force of *habits*, both good and evil, in the ſame exalted ſtrain: Job deſcribes mercy and charity to be ſo firmly fixed in him, as if the *inclination* to it were *born* with him: " from " my *youth* the poor was brought up with " me; and I have guided the widow from " my *mother's womb*". And the author of the book of Eccleſiaſticus, " wiſdom was " created with the faithful in the *womb*"; that is, ſome men are ſo truly good, ſo conſtantly and uniformly virtuous, as if virtue were a part of their very *nature*. On the contrary, David declares of his own great ſins, that he committed them with ſuch freedom, eaſe, and unconcern, as if he had been *born* a ſinner: " behold, I was *ſhapen* in ini- " quity; and in ſin did my *mother conceive* " me",

"me". And ſo of other lewd men, "the "wicked are eſtranged" (to goodneſs) "from "the *womb*: they go aſtray as ſoon as they "are *born*, ſpeaking lies". And Iſaiah, of the ſinful age in which he lived, "thou waſt "called a tranſgreſſor from the *womb*". In the ſame manner St. Paul, ſpeaking of himſelf in the perſon of an unregenerate ſinner, ſays, "in my fleſh dwelleth no good thing, I am "carnal, ſold under ſin"---every profligate man *ſells himſelf*, like *Ahab*; is a *ſlave* to his vices; *loſes all taſte* of virtue. Laſtly, this ſame apoſtle, in his epiſtle to the Epheſians, by *nature* unqueſtionably means no more than inveterate *habit*: "we were by "*nature* children of wrath, even as others". And why? Becauſe, ſays he, "we all had "our converſation", our *long* converſation, "among them"; and long uſe forms a ſecond nature. So it was *nature*, that is, univerſal *cuſtom*, which taught the Corinthians, that for the *men* "to wear long hair, was a ſhame to them.

You ſee here in theſe, as you may in twenty *other* inſtances, 'how apt *comparative and figurative expreſſions* are to be turned,

'by

'by weak heads and prejudiced hearts, into '*rigid and abſurd doctrines*'. But to proceed,

2. What are the pretences from the power of *Satan*, and the temptation of *evil ſpirits*? Becauſe *theſe* alſo are ſet out in grand and lofty terms, to ſkreen yourſelves from guilt, you would make them *unconquerable*. But mind what they will all come to, when you ſtrip off the metaphors, and look into the ſimple plain truth of theſe ſcriptures. Try the caſe of any temptation of this ſort, you can ſuppoſe yourſelf under. Deal by it in the ſame queſtions I juſt now propoſed to you, with reſpect to your *natural corruption*. Lay your hand to your heart, and then ſay--

"Does this temptation ſtifle my underſtand-
"ing, or put a bridle upon my free will?
"Does it blot out all my ſenſe of duty?
"Or do I ſtill remain fully conſcious, what
"I *can* do, and what I *ought to* do? If ſo,
"be the temptation whoſe it may, the
"compliance with it will be my own act,
"and my own crime".

Moreover; how do you know at any time, that this or that ſuggeſtion, or inclination to wickedneſs, proceeds from an *evil ſpirit*?

What

What ſecret *art* have you to diſtinguiſh it from the operations of your own mind, or the many *other* temptations you are encompaſſed with? You are *driven*, you think, to this or that bad practice. So you may effectually be, by your own evil habits, and evil deſires. Remember the words of St. James, in the verſe following the text: "every man is "tempted, when he is *drawn away of his* "*own luſt*".

However, be it as you ſuppoſe. They that talk ſo much of *one* wicked ſpirit, generally forget that there are *two* other ſpirits againſt that *ſingle* evil one, able to reſiſt and defeat all his attempts upon you; namely, the ſpirit of your *own mind* (unleſs you yourſelf have weakened and depraved it) ſupported by reaſon and conſcience, enlightened and fortified by the divine law, by glorious promiſes, and dreadful threatnings; by the beſt hopes, and the brighteſt expectations. And then, beſides this, you have the ſpirit of *God*, the kind and all-powerful aſſiſtant, the bleſſed comforter; who, when *you* have done *your* part, "will not ſuffer you to be tempted "above that ye are able, but will, with

"the

" the temptation, make a way for you to es-
" cape."

3. Take your next plea into ſerious conſi-deration. The *buſineſs* or the *difficulties* of life, may often, I confeſs, put both your patience, and your integrity, to a ſevere proof. A fair advantage may ſolicit you to an unfair thing, and circumſtances of fortune may preſs you to an illegal and an unjuſt one. Yet do but recollect what you have to carry you to the oppoſite and better ſide, and you will come off with victory, and unblemiſhed virtue! Whenever you ſee a proſpect of unrighteous gain; do not you ſee, all the while, what praiſe and commendation you may arrive at, by being juſt and faithful? Did ever any of you ſeize an opportunity of playing the knave, without knowing that *then* he had it in his beſt and happieſt power to be an honeſt man? Or did God, and his providence, ever prove you with poverty and want, without giving you reflection, and a conſcience to tell you, that, " if you would " truſt in *Him*, he would never leave you, " nor forſake you"; and that " your light " affliction which is but for a moment, was

" intended

" intended to work for you a far more ex-
" ceeding and eternal weight of glory"!

4. As to the doctrine of 'God's electing and 'reprobating any of his creatures to bliſs and 'miſery, without regard to their free action, and guilty behaviour'; I have had ſo frequent occaſions of expoſing this opinion, that I need *here* ſay but little about it. I will only point out to you one of the principal ſcriptures, on which it is founded. St. Paul, in the ninth chapter of his epiſtle to the Romans, plainly ſpeaks of certain " veſſels of wrath " fitted for deſtruction". But *who* were theſe veſſels? Not *particular perſons*, but a *nation*, the Jews at large. And for *what deſtruction* were they fitted? That of their temple and city, by the *Romans*; and the caſting them off from being any longer the *church* and *people* of God. And *by whom* were they fitted for this deſtruction? Not by Almighty God, but by their own repeated provocations, and infidelity.

5. One thing more, and I have done. " It " is *poſſible* you may be called to the hard trial " of ſuffering for your conſcience, and even " to lay down your life in defence of your " religion".

I am

I am well aware what entertainment would be given by moſt people at this time of day, to *a diſcourſe about the duty of martyrdom*. However, the terms of the goſpel are not to be altered by the opinions of *men*. It is ſtill a grand chriſtian maxim, "He that for Chriſt's "ſake will loſe his life, ſhall find it"---find it reſtored to him, not ſevenfold, but infinitely more than ſeventy times ſevenfold, in joy and felicity. "But he that like a coward "will ſave his life, ſhall loſe it; and *for* "*ever* loſe it". Here, then, I would only aſk one queſtion; 'why are ſuch loud enco-'miums beſtowed upon the man that dies in 'defence of his king, or the liberties of his 'country; while a ſneer of contempt is 'thrown upon the *very mention* of dying in 'the cauſe of that ſupreme King, who gave 'us life and being; and for the ſake of that 'celeſtial country, the liberties of which 'are nothing leſs than the glorious liber-'ties of the ſons of God'? And mark, I pray you, the wide difference of the two caſes! The mightieſt of earthly monarchs can only give his hero a little tranſient fame, but cannot poſſibly recall him one hour from the grave, or reſtore him to a ſingle moment

of

of life; whereas Christ will raise *his* faithful martyr to everlasting honour and reward!

And now let us take a summary view of the whole subject---Man was created, and still continues, a rational and free agent; endued with faculties, which, with the grace of God, are abundantly sufficient for all the ends of his being. At present indeed, he is but a candidate for future and higher joys; and is surrounded with a variety of trials, that are to exercise his obedience, and to train him up to his final perfection. He is placed in a world liable to be corrupt and actually corrupted. Vitious examples, and sensual pleasures, prompt him to many breaches of his duty. But then he is furnished with such ample assistances, from his own internal powers, from the instructions and commands of his Saviour, from the blessed word and spirit of God; that all taken together, demonstrate these trials to be the result of the divine wisdom and goodness totowards him; and his falling by temptation, to be solely his own fault and disgrace.

So that hence you have, in a short compass, the true origin of moral evil---'it comes

'not from God, or from nature, but from 'man's neglect and abuſe of nature and na-'tural liberty'.

Never therefore dare to forge vain excuſes, or to "charge God fooliſhly"; but take, and keep in mind, the words of a wiſe man, which will bring to your remembrance all that you have heard from *me* upon this weighty argument. "Say not thou, it is through the "Lord that I fell away: for thou oughteſt "not to do the things that He hateth. Say "not thou He hath cauſed me to err: for "He hath no need of the ſinful man. He "himſelf made man from the beginning, "and left him in the hand of his counſel. "He hath ſet before thee fire and water: "ſtretch forth thy hand unto whether thou "wilt. Before man is life and death; and "which he liketh, ſhall be given to him".

SERMON V.

MATTHEW, vii. 12.

All things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

IT is a matter of the utmoſt conſequence in any religion, that the laws or precepts of it be neceſſary and *plain*; and eſpecially that ſuch of them as more immediately concern mens duty and ſalvation, be as clear and obvious to their reaſon, as they are needful to their happineſs.

In is ſtill a farther advantage, if the rules it lays down are *ſhort* as well as eaſy. Clearneſs and conciſeneſs, when they are found together, make a rule perfect and complete. They aſſiſt the memory, at the ſame

time that they inform and enlighten the underſtanding; and incite us to *practiſe*, by affording all due helps, and taking away all excuſes.

Therefore thoſe teachers of virtue and moral duties ought always to be held in the higheſt eſteem, who have the art of delivering great rules in the feweſt and moſt familiar terms. And ſome among the Ancients have been juſtly admired upon this very account, that every line is a diſcourſe, and almoſt every word a ſentence. The ſcripture morals want none of the perfections of human wiſdom, but in many reſpects are vaſtly ſuperior to it: and *Solomon* is allowed on all hands to excel in *this* all that ever taught in Greece or Rome.

The precept in the text, "of doing as we "would be done by", as it is here ſtated by our bleſſed Saviour, is a remarkable inſtance of what I am ſpeaking of. It has all the properties abovementioned: is ſhort, level to all underſtandings, of univerſal importance and obligation.

In this light then I purpoſe to treat of it, and ſhall conſider,

I. The

I. The nature, true meaning, and limits of it.

II. The peculiar admirable qualities of it, as our Lord has here put it.

III. The indiſpenſable neceſſity of our careful obſervance of it.

And, I. As to the nature, true meaning, and limits, of this chriſtian duty. Some men are ſo ſubtle and diſingenuous, that they will endeavour to puzzle and pervert the moſt evident truths, and put a falſe conſtruction upon the cleareſt precepts. Therefore it muſt be remembered, that when our Lord ſays, "whatſoever ye would that men "ſhould do unto *you*, do ye even ſo to *them*"; it cannot ſignify, that 'whatever a man 'may, at any time or in any caſe, wiſh for, 'or be unreaſonable enough to deſire at the 'hands of another; that this, I ſay, is to be 'the *rule*, either for that man's dealing with 'him, or a rule to *himſelf* in dealing with 'others'. No! we are apt to be much too partial to ourſelves: and if our own private wiſhes and ſelfiſh deſires were to be the ſtandard of our actions, there would very often be little juſtice done, and a great deal of kindneſs would be wrongly placed.

The true uſe and deſign therefore, of this noble rule is this;-- 'for every man to con-'ſider the merits, to weigh the real circum-'ſtances, to ſtate the full right of the caſe, 'with his neighbour: and *then* to put him-'himſelf in his neighbour's place, and aſk 'himſelf what he might fairly expect, and 'hope to have done for him, in ſuch a ſitua-'tion'.

For example; a guilty criminal would, no doubt, be glad to have his judge acquit him, both of his crime and his puniſhment. But if this man would ſuppoſe himſelf to be the judge, and the judge to be the criminal; and thereby ſet before his eyes the wickedneſs of the crime, the miſchief done to the party injured and to his country, the abſolute fitneſs and neceſſity of puniſhment; he would *then* ſee himſelf in quite a new light, and would own that for *him* juſtice were better, than what he before *thought* to be mercy.

In like manner a debtor may be ſuppoſed to wiſh, that his creditor would freely forgive him his debt. But if he were to change ſides, and to find that the creditor was under no obligations to him, and really could not afford

afford to give away ſuch a ſum; he would acknowledge his very deſire of being releaſed from the debt, was not "doing as he would "be done by".

Again; the idle ſpendthrift, and the lazy healthy beggar (the worſt man upon earth, next to a notorious criminal) is wanting to be raiſed and relieved by any body and every body. But let him throw off the vagabond, and put on another character; and he will confeſs that inſtead of alms, he ought to have ſtripes; and that to do *him* juſtice would be, *not* to give him meat for his belly, but a whip for his back.

Once more; though all of us love to receive kindneſſes, yet whoever ſhould aſk a favour, that could not be granted without hurting and diſtreſſing his friend, would be guilty of breaking through the rules of all true friendſhip.

Theſe and many ſuch inſtances will eaſily ſhew you the proper limits of this grand duty; and that we are to require of other men, and always to act towards them, not what a corrupt notion of our own intereſt, not what a wild fancy and imagination, may prompt us to wiſh were done; but what appears,

upon mature conſideration of the relation and connections between us, to be fair and kind, equitable and reaſonable to be done.

So, when we are commanded to "love "our neighbour as ourſelves"; the meaning is not, that 'we are to put the welfare and 'happineſs of another man upon an exact 'level with our own' (which is impoſſible in nature) but that 'we ſhould be as willing to 'do what is juſt and generous by our neigh-'bour, as we are ready to expect and demand 'the ſame from him'.

And when you thus underſtand the rule, you will find it to be a golden one indeed! a guide, that will conduct you ſafe in all your dealings; teach you how to behave with propriety and integrity, in every ſituation of life; keep you innocent and virtuous, in your whole intercourſe and converſation with mankind.

To prevent another miſtake: when our Saviour tells us in the text, that "to do as "we would be done by, is the law and the "prophets"; he does not mean that 'this '*ſingle* precept is the ſum total of religion'; but that 'it comprehends the whole *ſecond* *table*

"*table* of the law, or that *part* of religious du-
"ty which we owe to our *neighbour*". And ſo St. *Paul* rightly ſtates it, in his epiſtle to the Romans, where he calls it "love, the *fulfil-*
"*ling* of the law. For this, thou ſhalt not
"commit adultery, thou ſhalt not kill, thou
"ſhalt not ſteal, and if there be any other
"commandment, it is briefly comprehended
"in this ſaying---thou ſhalt love thy *neigh-*
"*bour* as thy ſelf". It is true indeed, the *firſt* table of the law, containing our regards and duty to *God*, is inſeparably connected with the *ſecond*. For to do what is right and good towards *men*, without any reſpect to the *divine* will and authority, may perhaps be called *good nature*, but it is not properly *religion*; which ſuppoſes a ſenſe and reverence of *God* in the mind. In the twenty ſecond chapter of this goſpel, our Lord has explained himſelf more fully, and left leſs room for any miſtake: "On theſe *two* com-
"mandments" (the love of *God* and of our *neighbour*) "depend all the law and the pro-
"phets". And yet ſtill there is a *third*---*ſobriety to ourſelves*----which, though not mentioned, is moſt certainly implied and included in *them both*. For no one can diſ-

charge

charge his duty either to God or man, who has no thought of duty to *himſelf*; nor can intemperate luſts and violent paſſions poſſibly be gratified, but at the expence of the innocence or the property of others: ſo that all ſin againſt *ourſelves*, is a crime both againſt our *neighbour*, and againſt *Him that made us*.

And thus much for the meaning and limits of this precept, which teaches us to "make our own reaſonable deſires the mea-"ſure and ſtandard of our behaviour to other other men".

II. I come now to the ſecond thing propoſed---to lay before you it's peculiar excellence and importance: which I ſhall conſider, 1ſt, with regard to our external conduct; 2dly, to our thoughts and opinions of each other.

1ſt, Then; let us obſerve what a large and comprehenſive, what an exact and unerring law of action we here have, in the feweſt words imaginable: inſomuch that there is not an inſtance in the whole compaſs of life, not a poſt, nor an office, nor a condition of it can be named, but where *this* will be a "lantern to your feet, and a light to your "paths".

Some

Some are exalted to princely ſtate and dignity: ſome abound in wealth, while others are dependent, or oppreſſed by fortune. Some are placed in authority, others under command. Some are bleſt with great abilities and knowledge; many more are of inferior and weak underſtanding. To be ſhort; the conditions of human life are ſo various, that it is not a few words, nor a few pages, that can deſcribe, or even number them up. But it will be ſufficient to carry a perſon through every one of them, to remember with attention and an upright conſcience, what it is to "do as he would be done by".

If the man of *rule* and *power* wants to be informed, how *he* is to behave to thoſe beneath him; let him deſcend a while from his throne, and rank himſelf with the men that are to receive the law from his mouth, and that muſt be rendered happy or miſerable by *his* uſe or abuſe of his power. Will he not immediately picture to himſelf, how dreadful a thing is tyranny and oppreſſion; and how amiable it is, to behold power directed by equity, and accompanied with mercy and condeſcenſion.

Juſt

Juſt ſo, on the other ſide, a *ſubject* that is apt to be uneaſy, or prone to envy the grandeur of his ſuperiours, may be convinced of his error, and learn a better leſſon, by only turning the tables, and ſuppoſing himſelf the prince or the magiſtrate, and viewing the charge, the burden, and the cares of governing. And could he *then* do otherwiſe than confeſs a clear obligation upon every one, to "pay tribute to whom tribute is due, fear "to whom fear, honour to whom honour".

In the ſame plain road of conſcience (for conſcience is the plaineſt road in the world) let but the hard and unfeeling *maſter*, and the negligent faithleſs *ſervant*, exchange places for a while: and then let the one ſay, whether it is not a ſin and a ſhame to enjoy a man's labour without juſt wages, and giving him his meat in due ſeaſon: and the other, muſt he not bluſh to be paid and ſupported by the very perſon, to whom he ſhews himſelf a baſe and unjuſt ſteward!

To mention no more, out of numberleſs articles---the men of *trade* and *buſineſs* have nothing of greater conſequence, than to make the caſe and circumſtances of the men they

deal

deal or *contend* with, their own. Here indeed ſome things may be more nice, more intricate, and difficult to be determined. But yet, wherever our bleſſed Maſter's rule had it's due place, the difficulties would leſſen, and ſoon vaniſh; to the no ſmall diſappointment of thoſe people, whoſe art and ſtudy it too often is, to throw darkneſs upon clear caſes, to inflame mens paſſions under pretence of defending their rights, and by forms of law to confound *all* right and equity and property.

And thus far we have ſeen what the text injoins, as it relates to our *external actions*.

I am now, 2dly, to conſider it, as equally regulating our very *thoughts* and *ſentiments* of each other. It extends to the mind; and influences the inward as well as the outward conduct.

The all-wiſe God, who formed the human faculties, with all the variety of circumſtances that may occaſion different effects from the exerciſe of them in different men; *He*, I ſay, plainly foreſaw, that not only the common affairs of life, but even religion itſelf would inevitably be liable to ſome diſputes

diſputes and oppoſitions: He knew it to be impoſſible, that men ſhould all agree, and be perfectly unanimous, either in this or any other reſpect. But, to prevent the evils that might ariſe from hence, he has given us a ſacred maxim, which equally concerns and obliges us all: and that is, "to *think* as we "ſhould be glad to be *thought of*," as well as to do as we would be done by;---- 'to 'have charity in the *heart within*', as well as mere juſtice in *outward action*. And the expediency of this maxim is ſo very evident, that no man would ever be ſevere in his cenſures upon another, who would only conſider the candour and tenderneſs he himſelf would wiſh to meet with, were he in the place of the perſon whom he condemns.

Suppoſe, for inſtance, it had been *your* lot (and whoſe lot might it not have been) to be bred up under a particular governmen, in a particular neighbourhood or family, where the manner of your educati-on, the turn of your converſation, and the whole train of notions in your mind, had made it impoſſible for you to concur with the generality of men in ſome prevailing points

of

of *religion*. Aſk yourſelf, now, in ſuch a caſe, whether you could think you were treated with any moral equity, or civil juſtice, or religious temper, if the principles which *you* eſteem true and ſacred (and which are not at all *injurious to the community*) ſhould be deemed wicked, impious, and heretical! Eſpecially, if your pocket and your perſon, your liberty and eſtate, as well as your character, ſhould be made to pay for your conſcience! And, in fine, if you ſhould be ſentenced to everlaſting miſery in the next world, though you had done your beſt to ſerve God in the preſent one! Would not you put in your ſtrongeſt plea for *charity* towards every thing, but open vice and licentiouſneſs; and claim to have your *heart* left to God, who alone is able to judge of it?

Here then is your golden rule: "I go and "do *thou* likewiſe". Harbour no uncharitable thoughts of other mens conditions. Do not preſume to read what they have within them; nor ſay of them raſhly, what ſhall be to them hereafter. Pronounce no man wicked till his life and his deeds demonſtrate him to be ſo: and even *then* be as ſparing of your reproaches,

reproaches, as you can: make every favourable allowance the caſe will admit of. 'To 'judge haſtily and without mercy, is to be as 'great an oppreſſor and a tyrant in *opinion*, as 'others may be in *practice*'.

Thus have I ſet before you a noble, and a moſt extenſive duty. But remember, it is not more extenſive, than it is plain and eaſy in every particular. It ſuits all faculties, and lies within the reach of every capacity. Few of us could be ignorant of what is fair and equitable, if they would only attend to it. Every man has underſtanding enough, if he had but honeſty enough, to know himſelf; to ſtate his own juſt intereſt, and to ſet a price upon his own reputation. And this abundantly ſhews you the ſingular guilt of tranſgreſſing ſo evident a duty; and what a violation of conſcience there muſt neceſſarily be, in all acts of cruelty, knavery, and impoſition. And hence you alſo ſee the reaſon, why it is ſo difficult to perſuade men to *obſerve* this golden precept. Many, too many, are loath to *put themſelves in their neighbour's place*. The man of wealth and luxury, abhors the very name of *want* and *poverty*.

The

The great and the proud ſcorn and deteſt the very idea of a low and dependent condition. The extravagant rake never thinks at all, but is determined at all events to gratify his paſſions; and can even make a jeſt of the injury he is doing to his creditors, and to the public. All ſuch people as theſe, are wilfully blind; and will not open their eyes, to behold the bleſſed light, that would ſhew them the obligations they are under, to live and act like rational beings.

III. After what has been ſaid, I ſhould ſcarce imagine that any of you can want a *formal proof* of the neceſſity of obeying this univerſal law of morals. Be pleaſed only to conſider the thing in this ſtriking view. If any *one* man aſſumes a licence to do what is unjuſt and iniquitous by another, he muſt allow every *other* man to have an equal right (if it be not ridiculous to call it a *right*) to the ſame horrid privilege with himſelf. Suppoſe then that all of us had, and were actually to make uſe of, ſuch a licence:—what a world would this be to dwell in! In compariſon with ſuch a ſtate, the moſt lonely wilderneſs would be a paradiſe, and the "hole of a rock" a palace. *Friends* there

could be none: and *neighbours* would only be a nuſance and a terror to one another. And it would not be long, before the mightieſt of theſe villains would be reduced to his laſt prayers, and would wiſh to "have wings "like a dove, that he might flee away and "be at reſt". Indeed a community of men, all totally void of honeſt principles, or at leaſt of honeſt *practices*, is a contradiction in terms. Mutual juſtice, and a mutual exchange of good offices, are the very baſis of ſociety: which can no more ſubſiſt without *ſome degree* of them, than a building can ſtand without a foundation, or any thing elſe be done that is manifeſtly unnatural and abſurd. The more generally theſe ſocial virtues are cultivated, the happier mankind muſt neceſſarily be: and from the neglect of them proceed the numerous evils, we are daily bringing upon ourſelves, and thoſe about us. Such evils are the unavoidable effects of all unrighteous dealing. For the laws of God are founded in our nature, calculated for our good, and written in moſt legible characters upon the hearts of all men. He has placed us here together, that, by obſerving theſe eſſential rules, we might promote each other's welfare.

welfare. What then is every wicked man doing, but deſtroying the very ends for which he was created, and the purpoſes for which the world was made? And had God never given any expreſs declaration of it, it is in itſelf impoſſible for ſuch a man ever to "enter into the kingdom of heaven". For how can *he* be qualified to be a member of that "kingdom of truth and peace and righteouſneſs, which is to endure for ever"; who, for the ſhort life of a few years, could never be induced to "follow peace with all men", to "ſpeak the truth from his heart", or to "do as he would be done by"?

SERMON VI.

JOHN X. 14.

I am the good ſhepherd, and know my ſheep, and am known of mine.

IN the firſt ages of the world, when wealth and pleaſure had not yet corrupted the minds, or ſtained the innocence of mankind; before needleſs arts were invented, to adminiſter to the luxury and extravagancies of human life; the affairs of men conſiſted in a few, and thoſe the moſt natural and eaſy employments: in the tillage of the ground, and the cultivation of it's pure and wholeſome fruits; in the management of cattle, and the arts of huſbandry. In theſe lay all the buſineſs, as well as the riches, of our plain and honeſt forefathers.

Hence the title of *Shepherd*, in early times, was far above the mean and low ſenſe, in which it is *now* uſed; and carried in it a much more honourable character. Even Noah was but an huſbandman: and thoſe great men Abraham and Jacob, Lot and Laban, were graced with no higher appellation than that of ſhepherds.

Moreover, as the buſineſs of ſhepherds with their flocks, in many reſpects reſembles the care and power of princes and governors over their ſubjects; hence, by an eaſy and natural figure of ſpeech, the name of ſhepherd was applied in common both to the feeders and managers of cattle, and to the rulers of men. And it has been remarked by men of letters, that in ſome of the eaſtern languages, the offices of king and ſhepherd were expreſſed by one and the ſame word.

This will let you into the ſpirit and meaning of this phraſe, ſo often uſed in the ſcripture: where we find the emperor Cyrus called God's ſhepherd, and David ſaid to *feed*, that is to govern, his people; and even Almighty God himſelf deſcribed as the ſhepherd of Iſrael: under which metaphor you may with great pleaſure read the moſt lively

deſcrip-

deſcriptions of God, as the ſupreme guardian and protector of the jewiſh nation, in the pſalms and the prophets. "Give ear, O "ſhepherd of Iſrael", ſays the pſalmiſt, "thou that leadeſt Joſeph like a flock". And the prophet Ezekiel,---"thus ſaith the "Lord God; I will both ſearch my ſheep, "and ſeek them out, as a ſhepherd ſeeketh "out his flock---and I will feed them upon "the mountains of Iſrael, by the rivers----I "will feed them in good paſture----I will "feed them with judgment---I will ſave my "flock----I will ſet up one ſhepherd over "them, even my ſervant David: he ſhall "feed them, and ſhall be their ſhepherd".

What has been ſaid, will likewiſe ſhew you the fitneſs and propriety of thoſe prophetic expreſſions in the Old Teſtament, where *Chriſt* the *Meſſiah* is pointed out as a *ſhepherd* over God's people; and of thoſe which our Saviour himſelf uſes, when he repreſents his care and government of his church under the ſame image, and ſets forth the tempers and diſpoſitions, the duties and qualifications, of his ſubjects and diſciples, by the emblem of his *ſheep*. This he does in ſeveral places of the New Teſtament, and

particularly in this chapter of St. John, from which the text is taken: "I am the "good ſhepherd, and know my ſheep, and "am known of mine".

In diſcourſing farther upon which words, I ſhall,

I. Lay before you the peculiar bleſſings of the government and religion of Chriſt, as the Lord of chriſtian people, which are here implied in the phraſe of his "being the good "ſhepherd".

II. I ſhall conſider what temper of mind, what conduct and behaviour, is neceſſary to entitle us to theſe bleſſings, and to denominate us his true ſubjects and diſciples, as included in the phraſe of our "being his ſheep", "knowing him", and "being known of him".

I. The character of a good ſhepherd is plainly deſigned to repreſent our Saviour as a gracious maſter and protector; in whoſe dominion over us are all thoſe qualities and conditions, that can be deſirable towards the well-being and proſperity of his ſubjects; all, in ſhort, that is comprehended in the noble relation he bears to us, as men and chriſtians. And 1ſt, his government is endeared

to

to us by this conſideration, that we are ſtrictly *his own*: "whoſe *own* the ſheep are", as he himſelf expreſſes it in the twelfth verſe; in oppoſition to *hired* ſhepherds, and deputies: meaning, that we are under his own immediate eye and direction. A charge that is taken at ſecond hand, may ſometimes indeed be conducted tolerably well, upon a principle of honour, credit, or intereſt: but it is often found, *not* to be attended with a concern that reaches ſo deep; and is apt to be neglected for pleaſure, forgotten by diverſions, and cannot ſtand the ſhock of much trouble and danger. It is right, poſſeſſion, and property in any thing, that renders our care of it active, vigorous, and laſting. Few *ſervant* ſhepherds are to be found like Jacob, in the book of Geneſis; "who brought no-"thing to his maſter, that was torn of "beaſts; but bore the loſs of it himſelf". Under whoſe management the "ewes never "caſt their young, nothing was ſtolen by "day, or by night"; whoſe ſtrength was "conſumed in the day time by drought, and "by the froſt in the night, and whoſe ſleep "departed from his eyes". This ſignal advantage then *we* have, as ſubjects of the kingdom

kingdom of Chriſt. He commits our final ſafety to no deputies, whoſe own we are not. He has not ſubjected our faith to the fallible and arbitrary determinations of any human guides, nor made our future doom to depend upon the bleſſings or curſings of any mortal man. The bread he feeds us with, is his own word, even the ſure word of life. The precepts and promiſes and threatnings he has given us, are all contained in that word. And though the miniſtry of others may indeed be uſeful, in helping us to underſtand them; yet *they only* are the rule and ſtandard we are to refer to, and muſt expect to ſtand or fall by. The apoſtle tells us, we are not even *our own*; "for ye are bought", ſays he, "with a *price*", the price of the precious blood of Chriſt. And as this lays under the ſtrongeſt obligation to be dutiful and obedient to ſo gracious a redeemer: ſo is it matter of the ſincereſt comfort to us, that *He* is our only owner and maſter, that to *his* dictates we have conſtant freedom of appeal, and that to his tribunal alone we are accountable, as to our ſpiritual and final condition.

II. Another

2. Another light in which our Saviour appears, under the character of the *good ſhepherd*, reſpects the nature of his laws, and the wiſdom and mercy of his government over us.

Of all the relations in which an intelligent being can be conſidered, that of authority and command over others, is the niceſt and the higheſt: requiring the utmoſt degree of knowledge, wiſdom, goodneſs, and fidelity; as being concerned with the various tempers and intereſts of the governed, as well as with the care of it's own honour. And therefore deſpotic and unlimited power is the worſt and moſt dangerous kind of it, among ſuch frail and paſſionate creatures as *we* are. Abſolute dominion, in the hands of men, has almoſt always been found a moſt diſagreeable and deſperate thing. But, wherever it is joined with perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, *there* the greater the power is, the more bleſſed and amiable does it become to thoſe that are under it's influence. Thus it is with *us*, and the great "ſhepherd and biſhop of "our ſouls". In *Him* are "all the treaſures "of wiſdom and knowledge", and of goodneſs

neſs likewiſe anſwering to that knowledge. *His* laws are the rules of heaven; formed with a view to the benefit of the ſubject, not merely to diſplay the authority of the law-giver. They are all adapted to our nature, and productive of thoſe valuable qualifications in us, which advance our preſent felicity, and can alone ſecure our future one. To induce us to obſerve them, and to give us life and ſpirit in the whole diſcharge of our duty; he has annexed to them rewards and penalties, the moſt intereſting and engaging. There is not an inſtance of any virtue that can adorn the mind of man, wanting in his goſpel; nor a motive to the practice of it, forgotten in his religion. The very reſtraints he has laid upon us, are really favours: the very puniſhments he has denounced, terminate in good to the whole flock. When David had aſſured himſelf that "God was his ſhepherd", his concluſion could not but be as certain, as it was delightful: "therefore", ſays he, "I ſhall lack "nothing. He ſhall feed me in a green paſ-"ture, and lead me forth beſide the waters "of comfort. He ſhall convert" (or refreſh) "my

" my ſoul, and bring me in the paths of " righteouſneſs". How juſtly may each of *us* apply theſe words to himſelf, when he conſiders what an inſeparable connection his Saviour has eſtabliſhed, between his duty and his happineſs! To be inſtructed in the *chriſtian* righteouſneſs, is to be fed in thoſe paſtures, that are truly refreſhing to reaſonable minds: and to be aſſiſted by the grace of God in attaining that righteouſneſs, is truly to be led to the waters of comfort.

Add to this, the mercy and indulgence ſo viſible in this heavenly government of Chriſt; ---in the encouragements he has given to the weak, if honeſt, endeavours of the meaneſt ſubject; in the tender allowances made to the ſeveral infirmities and circumſtances, to the want of knowledge and abilities, in every perſon. No more is impoſed upon any, than he is able to bear: no more required of any, than the improvement of what has been given him. Nay, and when we are " gone out of " the way", we are to be received again, upon the juſt and equitable terms of true repentance: even after we have ſinned, if we will return to our duty, He himſelf is " our advocate with the Father", He himſelf is

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the "propitiation for our ſins". Thus has this bleſſed Maſter fulfilled the deſcriptions given him, under the character of the *good ſhepherd*, by the ancient prophets. "He ſhall "feed his flock", ſays Iſaiah, "like a ſhep-"herd; He ſhall gather the lambs with his "arm, and carry them in his boſom, and "gently lead thoſe that are with young." And Ezekiel; "I will ſeek that which was "loſt, and bring again that which was driven "away, and will bind up that which was "broken, and ſtrengthen that which was "ſick".

3. I ſhall obſerve but one thing more, for completing our idea of Chriſt's government over us. And it is, what He himſelf has mentioned, as the finiſhing part of this his character: "the good ſhepherd", ſays He, "*lays down his life* for the ſheep." In this and the foregoing and following verſes, our Saviour alludes to thoſe deſert countries, which abounded with wild beaſts, or with neighbouring people who lived upon ſpoil and robbery. Upon which account, ſtrength and valour, as well as care and fidelity, were eſteemed neceſſary qualifications of a good ſhepherd. The flock was not only to

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be duly fed and watered, but to be guarded and defended, ſometimes at the hazard of the keeper's life. In this figure then is repreſented, though but faintly, that unexampled reſolution of goodneſs and love, which brought down the ſon of God from heaven, to give up his life a ranſom for us men. *Men* will ſometimes, indeed, venture and ſuffer a great deal for one another, upon various principles. Some from a generous friendſhip, others for preſent fame and honour, and many with a view to their own intereſt and the hope of ſome private advantage. But in the death of our heavenly ſhepherd, there was no poſſible motive, but that of pure compaſſion and mercy. The greateſt love that can be ſeen in *man* is, to "lay down his life for "his *friend*": but all ſuch goodneſs was far ſurpaſſed, when, while "*we* were yet "*enemies*, Chriſt died for us"! This it is, that diſcovers the peculiar bleſſing of his dominion over us. Whenever a people are governed by a power of mere conqueſt, how uncertain and precarious are all their enjoyments, rights, and privileges! How do they dread the laws, ſuſpect every proceeding, even the ſofteſt promiſes and favours,

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of their conqueror! How happy therefore, beyond expreſſion, are the ſubjects of this celeſtial kingdom of Chriſt! who rules them for no other reaſon, but becauſe He loves them; who has gained them, and made them his own, only by his kindneſs to them, by ſuffering and dying for them! I ſhall conclude this head with that ſtrong and affectionate argument of St. Paul: "He that ſpar-"ed not his own ſon, but gave him up for "us all; how ſhall not He with *Him* alſo "freely give us all things"!

II. Having made theſe ſhort obſervations upon the character here aſſumed by our bleſſed Saviour, as proper to ſet forth the nature of this religion and government; I come *now* to conſider the behaviour and qualities, neceſſary to denominate men his true followers and diſciples; ſignified *here* by their being ſtiled his *ſheep*. In which is implied, 1, a tractable temper, and an honeſt impartial deſire to know the will of God, in order to pleaſe and obey him.

It is a common remark, that the ſheep is one of the moſt docile of all creatures, and the moſt eaſy to be managed and governed.

verned. Eſpecially in the eaſtern countries, and in thoſe times when the feeding of cattle was one principal employment of life, they are deſcribed as underſtanding the ſeveral different ſigns and voices of their keepers, to an exquiſite degree. To which our Saviour ſeems often to allude in this chapter; particularly in the twenty-ſixth and twenty-ſeventh verſes; where he ſays, "my ſheep "hear my voice, and they follow me"; meaning thus---that 'men of ſincere and 'upright minds, would not fail to receive his 'doctrine and to make a progreſs in it, pro-'portioned to their ſeveral capacities and un-'derſtandings'. On the other hand he tells the Jews, that "*they* believed him *not*, be-"cauſe they were *not of his ſheep*"; that is, becauſe they were of a quite contrary diſpoſition; prejudiced, obſtinate, ſenſual, and worldly minded. And therefore thoſe, even among the *Heathens*, who were morally good and virtuous men, he is pleaſed, in this chapter, to acknowledge as his *ſheep*. "And "*other* ſheep I have, which are not of *this* "*fold*: them alſo I muſt bring, and they "ſhall hear my voice".

In general then you ſee what it is, that muſt qualify a man, either to embrace the religion of Chriſt at all; or to be worthy of it's character, and entitled to it's bleſſings, after he *has* embraced it: namely, 'a frank 'and ingenuous heart; open to conviction, 'willing to follow the light of truth, and to 'improve itſelf in the knowledge and practice 'of it's duty'.

2. Another quality, recommended to us by this emblem, as an eſſential ingredient in the character of a chriſtian, is an inoffenſive, peaceable, and charitable behaviour.

It has been obſerved by learned men, that, in the eaſtern tongues, the ſame word, which ſtands for a ſheep, denotes alſo it's natural temper, towards it's own ſpecies, and other creatures; and points out that innocence, ſubmiſſion, and ſweetneſs, by which this animal is apt to win the love of mankind, almoſt above any other. It is one of thoſe creatures, that look upon all about them without malice or ill deſign; offers no attacks, but is patient, and forgetful of injuries from other beaſts; makes little or no defence, meditates no revenge, looks upon the

the ſhearer without anger, and parts even with it's life with but ſmall reſiſtance.

Nothing could have been a more lively image of that ſimplicity, good nature, and integrity, in our dealings and converſation with each other, which are the great comfort and bleſſing of a ſocial life. No figure could have better comprehended the ſum of thoſe goſpel precepts, which command us to be "harmleſs and blameleſs, as the ſons "of God; not to go beyond, or defraud our "brother in any matter; to live peaceably "with all men; to bleſs them that curſe us, "and to pray for them who deſpitefully uſe, "and perſecute us"; to love one another with that affection and charity, by which "all men are to know that we are Chriſt's "diſciples"---with an affection, that ſcorns all artifice, and hypocriſy; with a charity, that will incline us to judge favourably, and to hope the beſt, in all caſes; eſpecially where there may be any matter of *diſpute* between us and our fellow chriſtians, whether in religious or other concerns. For the purpoſe of the *goſpel* is to promote peace and harmony and a good underſtanding

among mankind. It ſuppoſes that it's doctrines will be offered to men, various in their apprehenſions and conceptions. It takes for granted, that hence there will neceſſarily ariſe a difference of opinion amongſt it's members. But it kindly provides againſt any evil conſequences, by directing us to attend to thoſe weightier points, which we all clearly underſtand, and ought chiefly to regard; and to compound with each other for all leſſer matters, by this great law of charity.

Some ancient countries are ſaid to have eſteemed the *ſheep of the flock*, as the beſt and moſt acceptable of all *ſacrifices*; not for it's ſize, or coſtlineſs, but on account of the meekneſs and gentleneſs of it's nature, which was thought to repreſent that humility and ſerenity of mind, with which it becomes mankind to worſhip the Deity. And certainly, without this, no ſacrifice can be grateful, no obligation can be pure, in his eyes. When our paſſions are fierce and violent, and our ſentiments envious or full of reſentment; they ſmother and ſuppreſs all the incenſe we can offer. But when the

ſoul

ſoul is filled with humanity and good will to it's fellow creatures, it's prayers aſcend in brighteſt flame, and are carried uninterruptedly towards heaven.

The application of what has been ſaid upon this ſubject, ſhall be contained in the two following articles.

1. If ſuch be the nature of Chriſt's government over us, as above deſcribed; then it highly concerns all thoſe who are *miniſters* and *paſtors* of his church, ſo to employ the commiſſion they have from *Him*, as to attain the true *ends* of this his government.

They therefore are the *good ſhepherds* of his flock, who deal by the ſheep, as their Lord Himſelf has done. Who lead them to wholeſome paſtures, and give them the waters of his original ſpring, uncorrupt and pure; as far as human abilities can diſcern and diſpenſe them. They, in ſhort, who honeſtly endeavour to teach the ſame ſound and ſolid religion which *He* taught; to build men up in that holy faith, which *He himſelf* delivered to the ſaints; and to enforce the great and important duties of his goſpel: of which "if they put the brethren in remem-"brance, they will be good miniſters of Je-

ſus Chriſt": and "when the *chief ſhepherd* "ſhall appear, they ſhall receive the crown "of glory that fadeth not away"

2. If under this familiar emblem our Saviour intend to point out the temper and behaviour of his moſt approved diſciples; it is eaſy from hence to learn, what it is to be a chriſtian. Let as many of us therefore as profeſs themſelves ſuch, give all diligence to deſerve that excellent character. Let us ſtudy to live peaceably in the world, by a juſt and friendly treatment of our fellow chriſtians; to prevent the ill effects of religious and all other differences, by a ſpirit of moderation and candour; to put away enmity and malice, by mutual forbearance and forgiveneſs of each other. For if we do theſe things, we ſhall *then* be indeed the "ſons "of God", the "ſheep and true diſciples of "Chriſt". We ſhall *then* "know him, "and follow him, and hear his voice". And *then* we ſhall likewiſe be "*known of him*", that is be *owned* and *accepted* by him, and find that reſt to our ſouls, which will be the ſure portion of all thoſe, who "learn of *Him* to be meek and lowly of heart".

To him be aſcribed.---

SERMON

SERMON VII.

HEBREWS X. 25.

Not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is; but exhorting one another.

THOUGH there is nothing of ſo much concern as religion to the happineſs of mankind, yet nothing, generally ſpeaking, is either leſs underſtood, or leſs regarded. We uſually ſee men applying themſelves to the common buſineſs of life, with great induſtry, activity, and prudence; uſing ſuch means as are proper to gain their ends, and taking care to be verſed in all the arts of worldly wiſdom. But as to religion, the rule that is to guide the moral life, how different is their behaviour! Many of us are

eaſy to be impoſed upon in the plaineſt truths: or content themſelves with a bare outſide ſhew of godlineſs; or ſpend their zeal about matters of the leaſt moment: and are ſtriving to be ſaved by any thing, rather than the pains of being truly good. While ſome go ſo far in the other extreme, as to caſt off all *appearance* of religion, and refuſe to give it any external countenance or encouragement: as if it were an affair of no conſequence, or ſome way injurious to mens natural rights and enjoyments.

This, however, was not quite the caſe, with thoſe perſons, the author of this epiſtle here ſpeaks of. *They* probably forſook the aſſembling with their fellow chriſtians, not ſo much from a thoughtleſs diſregard of the duty itſelf, as from fear of perſecution and ſuffering for conſcience ſake. The times were then very hard: and to be known to be chriſtians, might expoſe them to the hazard of forfeiting their liberty, and even life itſelf.

But no diſcouragement the goſpel met with in thoſe early ages, was a ſufficient excuſe for deſerting the profeſſion of it. The apoſtles, we find, would not allow it as an excuſe;

excuſe; and required a ſtrict attendance upon the religious meetings, under every diſadvantage. So that there were but "*ſome*" (perhaps but few) when St. Paul had occaſion to cenſure for this neglect. For the chriſtians met together as often as ever they could, in the ſevereſt times: and whoever did not chuſe to ſubmit to any temporal inconvenience, rather than give up the cauſe of his Maſter, was very juſtly thought unworthy to be called a diſciple.

It is impoſſible *not* to reflect, how widely different is the conduct of the chriſtians of the preſent age and nation; ſo many of whom forſake the ſervice of their God and Saviour, while it is not only incumbent upon them from all the arguments of reaſon and ſcripture, but is ſolemly injoined by the civil power, by the laws of our conſtitution, and the authority of our governors!

In what follows, I ſhall,

I. Conſider the neceſſity of prayer in general, and the peculiar advantage of public worſhip.

II. I ſhall endeavour to anſwer the ſeveral pleas, that are likely to be offered by ſuch as abſent from it.

And,

And, I. Prayer is that addreſs to Almighty God, in which we acknowledge our dependence upon Him, and declare our ſenſe of the goodneſs and power by which we were brought into being, and are ſtill preſerved and ſupported. In divine worſhip, we confeſs the Deity to be the ſource and giver of all good; and requeſt from Him ſuch a meaſure of it, as the condition we are placed in may require, or he in his wiſdom ſhall ſee moſt expedient for us: we profeſs our obligations to love and adore him for all his mercies towards us, our hearty ſorrow for thoſe actions wherein we have knowingly offended him, and our ſincere reſolution to live for the future according to his righteous laws.

This is a duty, ariſing not merely from the poſitive command of the Deity himſelf, but from *our* nature and *His* nature; from the abſolute and unchangeable relation, which the one bears to the other. And it would have been an indiſpenſable duty, though God had never revealed his will, or the ſcriptures had never ſaid a word about it. To worſhip the ſupreme free cauſe of your exiſtence, to beg for bleſſings you feel yourſelves in need

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of, to return thanks for thoſe you have already received, to aſk forgiveneſs of ſins you are conſcious you have committed;---theſe, I ſay, are ſome of the plaineſt dictates of a grateful and ingenuous mind. To do nothing of this kind, is the moſt abſurd Atheiſm: it is declaring ourſelves dependent upon no ſuperior, but entirely ſufficient for our own happineſs; not ſubject to any rule of morals, but at liberty to act in what manner we pleaſe. Whereas univerſal experience, and every occurrence of our lives, demonſtrate how weak and helpleſs we are, how unable by our own mere foreſight and power to provide for ourſelves, and how inceſſantly we are beholden to the univerſal Benefactor for all that we enjoy in the preſent ſtate, or can hope for in any other; and conſequently that it is our higheſt intereſt, as well as duty, carefully to avoid whatever we know to be diſpleaſing to him. And what is ſo, every man's conſcience ſufficiently informs him; by pointing out the plain difference between good and evil, between what he ought, and what he ought *not* to do, as a rational creature; and telling him that the

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one cannot but be agreeable, and the other contrary, to the will of the Creator, which is the pureſt and moſt perfect reaſon.

Prayer, accordingly, is ſo evident a duty, that it has always been looked upon as a capital branch of religion. All nations have agreed, in paying homage to the ſeveral Gods they believed in. Gratitude to thoſe whom they imagined to be the authors of their life and happineſs, is a leſſon that nature has ever taught men from the beginning. And though the Heathens were indeed groſsly miſtaken, as to the *object* of their devotion; yet they manifeſtly ſaw, and could not help ſeeing, that the *duty itſelf* was highly becoming and neceſſary. The general conſent of mankind in this point, is alone a ſtrong argument in it's behalf; and ſhews it to be the reſult of mens primitive and moſt ſimple conceptions of things.

But as chriſtians, our obligations to this duty will appear in a ſtill ſuperiour light. We have it recommended to us both in the precepts, and the whole life of our bleſſed Maſter; whoſe piety was as eminent as all his other virtues. It is injoined in every

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page of the writing of his apoſtles, who themſelves prayed continually. Great promiſes are annexed in ſcripture to a due obſervance of it. We are aſſured that God is ready to grant every petition, that is conſiſtent with our true happineſs, and the meaſures of his own government: and that if we deſire his bleſſings, we have nothing to do, but to take care to deſerve them. "Aſk", ſays our Lord, "and ye ſhall have; ſeek, "and ye ſhall find".

But though the ſcriptures do thus in general enforce this duty, yet they tie us down to no particular way or manner of performing it. The time and place and other circumſtances of it, as the caſe ſtood when the ſcriptures were written, could not be reduced to any fixed rule: and indeed it is a matter of human prudence, to regulate theſe things. Prayer may be either private or public. The former more immediately relates to a man's ſelf: the latter has reſpect to all about us, as we are a body of chriſtian people. The great end of both is the ſame;--- 'to cultivate in 'the mind ſuch a reverence of God, and 'ſuch devout and worthy ſentiments of him, 'as will lead us to obey him heartily and 'ſincerely'.

'ſincerely'. The private worſhipper performs this duty for his own ſake, and to keep his own heart in conſtant good frame and temper. But public devotion has it's aim at, and it's good effect upon, *others*. It is a *ſocial* duty, and is deſigned to promote a ſenſe of religion among the people at large: which cannot poſſibly be done, without ſome popular and outward profeſſion of it. A religious community, like every other, is to be ſupported, *not* by ſecret wiſhes, but by the joint and open aſſiſtance, of all that belong to it. They "exhort", they animate one another by conſpiring in the ſame acts of devotion, by publickly profeſſing one and the ſame faith, and declaring the ſame hope in the ſame God and Saviour of them all.

If you will give yourſelves the trouble to conſider this matter, you will eaſily ſee that the bulk of mankind would be in infinite hazard of loſing what few notions they have of religion, were they deprived of all opportunities of aſſembling together, and being influenced by the authority and example of their *ſuperiors*. The man that holds the plough, and labours for daily bread, underſtands but little of the *reaſons* upon which the

the goſpel is founded; and is entirely directed by the behaviour of thoſe, whom he ſuppoſes to be wiſer and more knowing than himſelf. And therefore a good example has more weight with *him*, than ten thouſand *arguments*, where this is wanting. And the ſeeing ſuch examples of goodneſs and piety, does more ſubſtantial ſervice to the cauſe of chriſtianity, than all the other means that ever were invented for the propagation of it.

There never did in fact any religion ſubſiſt in the world, without ſome general meetings of thoſe who profeſſed it. The Heathens had certain times of coming together, to offer ſacrifice, and pray to the Gods after their manner. Under the jewiſh law, every ſeventh day was ſet apart for religious purpoſes, by the ſpecial command of God himſelf. The ſame cuſtom, with a change only of the day, has been obſerved by chriſtians in all ages. The enemies of Revelation, in the early times, were determined if poſſible to ſuppreſs theſe aſſemblies: well knowing that, if they could once diſunite and diſperſe the *men*, the *religion* would preſently fall away, and come to nothing. But the chriſtians were

were not eaſily terrified by theſe perſecutions. They foreſaw the ſame bad conſequence, and remembered the injunctions the apoſtles had laid upon them. And therefore they held together, and kept up their ſociety, with amazing reſolution, even in times of the utmoſt danger.

Upon the whole then. Public worſhip is the only thing, that can maintain a public regard to our holy religion; which, without it, would quickly be loſt and forgotten. This would be to loſe the greateſt bleſſing the world ever yet enjoyed; and muſt, in the opinion of all wiſe men, be the moſt fatal loſs it could ſuſtain. For chriſtianity has diſcovered to us the moſt important truths. It has inſtructed us in the nature of God, and in every part of our duty to *Him*, and to each other. It has enlarged our minds, and extended our views. It has laid open the deſigns of providence towards us, informed us by whom and for what end we were made, and above all how we may be happy, both *here* and for ever. Theſe are the noble gifts of light and knowledge, with which Chriſt has bleſſed his church: and, were it

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poſſible for the "gates of hell to prevail "againſt it", it would immediately relapſe into that darkneſs and idolatry, which ſo univerſally reigned before his appearance, and *as* univerſally reigns over thoſe parts of the earth that have not yet received his goſpel.

II. The duty before us being thus eſtabliſhed, let us in the next place conſider the pleas, that are uſually offered by ſuch as tranſgreſs it.

Some alledge, that "they can ſerve God "in their own houſes, and can edify them-"ſelves at home". It is to be feared that few of thoſe who thus openly affront the religion of their country, pray much in private. But, ſuppoſe they do: *that* will be no ſufficient excuſe. For there are many advantages ariſing to ſociety from public worſhip, which every member of ſociety is indiſputably bound to attend to. Indeed, as far as man's ſelf only is concerned, private devotion may fully anſwer all good purpoſes. And could every man prevail with himſelf to give up a due portion of his time to prayer and other religious exerciſes, there would certainly be much leſs need of any common

and united ſervice. But alas! conſidering how remiſs we are in things of this nature, *that* muſt never be expected. Many peoples lives, you ſee, are a mere round of diſſipation and diverſion; while others find it difficult to ſtruggle through the world, and have their time and thoughts wholly taken up in providing for their neceſſities. All perſons in ſuch circumſtances, without ſome fixed and ſtated occaſions to call them off from theſe vanities and ſervile engagements, would be ſtrangers to the appearance and the very name of religion. Not to mention what numbers there are, among all the inferior ranks of men, who know not how to pray by themſelves; and are ſo poorly acquainted with their own language, as to be utterly unable to compoſe prayers for their own uſe, or at all to worſhip God in private. The only thing ſuch men can do, is to come together at a time and place appointed, where they may have ſuitable prayers read to them, and be guided in their devotion. So that the retired worſhipper conſults only his own perſonal benefit, and acts the merely ſelfiſh part: he forgets the encouragement he ſhould give to his weaker brethren: he overlooks the

the ſocial part of his chriſtianity. What is here ſaid, is by no means intended to diſcountenance private prayer, conſidered in itſelf, and rightly uſed; but only to ſhew you, that it cannot be ſo proper for you in your civil and *national* characters, as a viſible and general ſervice. The one is piety confined within your own breaſts, the other is that ſame piety made exemplary to others. And while the one can cheriſh religion in a few individuals only, the other does it both in *them* and all that are about them. It is very natural to infer, that 'if even thoſe abſenters 'from the public worſhip cannot be juſtified, 'who really pray at home; much leſs ſtill 'can be ſaid for them, who never pray at all'.

Hence it will likewiſe appear, that your own *edification* is not the only point to be conſidered, in attending the ſervice of the church, and hearing the word of God. They, who may not want edification themſelves, ſhould "let their light ſhine before thoſe "who *do*". Chriſtianity does not conſiſt in intricate *ſyſtems*, and refined ſubtleties; but in things that are level to all underſtandings. It was graciouſly given us to be our guide in common and daily life. It's chief end is, to

perſuade men to the obſervance of a ſet of precepts, that are as plain as the prophet's viſion: "he that runs, may read them". But, notwithſtanding the grand articles of religion are thus undeniably clear; how liable are they to be overlooked and forgotten! How do mens pleaſures and paſſions make them thoughtleſs of the moſt evident truths, and negligent of the moſt allowed duties! It is not therefore *information* that is ſo much wanted, as the being reminded and exhorted to practiſe what you know already. And though you are far too wiſe to be inſtructed in any thing *new*, you will frequently ſtand in need of our Saviour's admonition--- "if ye *know* theſe things, *happy are ye* if ye "*do* them".

Laſtly; that *worldly buſineſs* may not prevent our meeting here together, the cuſtom of all chriſtians, and the laws of our own government, have wiſely devoted every ſeventh day to religious uſes: that men might both be refreſhed from their ordinary labours, and be at leiſure to recollect what is of ſuperior and more laſting conſequence: that we might not be wholly engaged in the cares of the preſent life, but have time to look forward,

ward, and make proviſion for another. On *common* days, the generality of men cannot properly attend to things of this nature; and there are particular occaſions, when the *ſabbath* itſelf may be lawfully and innocently broken. "The ſabbath", ſays the Lord of it, "was made for man, not man for the "ſabbath". Theſe are caſes of *neceſſity*, that happens ſo ſeldom, and to ſo few perſons, as to be no diſſervice to religion, nor the leaſt hindrance to the public worſhip. But whether the men, who are never ſeen in any place of devotion, employ their time in a more rational, or a more profitable manner; let any one that knows their lives and converſations, judge for himſelf. I am ſure you have often obſerved with concern, that the hours eſpecially of this day, which might be improved to the moſt excellent purpoſes, hang like a dead weight upon the hands of ſome, and are waſted by others in idleneſs and licentiouſneſs, to the ruin of themſelves and their families. What a reproach is this to a nation, where the goſpel of Chriſt is as well underſtood, and I might perhaps ſay taught in as much purity, as in any other.

And yet the Engliſh, of all proteſtant people, have the thinneſt congregations, and the leaſt veneration for the religion they profeſs.

It is a known remark, that 'breaking the 'ſabbath is an unhappy ſtep to every ſpecies of 'wickedneſs'; and that the people guilty of it, are for the moſt part worthleſs and profligate creatures, that have little ſenſe of any other duty, and treat every obligation with the like contempt. And how can it be otherwiſe, when the belief of religion is the nobleſt principle of morality; and a firm perſuaſion that 'God will judge the world 'in righteouſneſs', the ſtrongeſt motive to all that is good and praiſe worthy! Nothing can uniformly reſtrain us from vice, nothing can make us uniformly virtuous, but a juſt idea of the power and providence of God, and that it is our duty and happineſs to worſhip and ſerve him. He therefore, who has none of this belief, will infallibly break through every rule of virtue and good manners, whenever his paſſions urge him to it, and he can eſcape preſent puniſhment. And when once a man has brought himſelf to deſpiſe the laws of *God*, you can have no poſſible

poſſible tie upon him to obey the laws of the *land*, any farther than force and neceſſity compel him to it.

Will a ſervant regard the authority of a maſter he may deceive every hour, when he thinks himſelf ſafe from all inſpection of that governor, whoſe eye no action, no thought, can eſcape? Will a ſon or a daughter curb their deſires to pleaſe an earthly parent, when a looſe and irreligious education has diveſted them of all fear of the ſupreme Father and Lord of all things? No! the atheiſt himſelf, if he is not as mad as he is miſtaken, will be a friend to private religion as the ſureſt bond of all private dealing, and to public religion as the beſt preſervative of national peace and the common weal.

Let us then be mindful to ſhun an example, that has ſo little to recommend it; that is never likely to do any good, and has done, and muſt do a great deal of miſchief. Let us be conſtant in our attendance upon the ſervice of God, and contribute our utmoſt aid to ſupport his true religion, and to diſcourage whatever tends to corrupt our minds and morals of the people. For whatever does this, does *ſo far* deſtroy all order and go-

vernment, and puts every man's property and perſon in danger. By ſuch behaviour therefore, you will take the beſt method *to ſecure yourſelf* (and that is an argument, which no man can refuſe) and at the ſame time be highly uſeful to your fellow creatures and fellow chriſtians.

I ſhall conclude with the advice of our apoſtle, in the end of this chapter; which comprehends, in one brief ſentence, the ſum and ſubſtance of all other perſuaſives--- "be "not in the number of them who draw "back unto perdition, but of them that be-"lieve to the ſaving of the ſoul".

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

PROVERBS xvii. 27.

A man of underſtanding is of an excellent ſpirit.

THOUGH all things which God has made, be not endued with equal perfections, nor carry in them the ſame degree of excellency; yet nothing appears in all the variety of nature, but what has it's peculiar excellencies, and diſplays the beauties that are proper to it, and beſpeak the wiſdom and goodneſs of the infinite Creator.

Theſe beauties are ſeverally to be ſeen and judged of, by the uſes and purpoſes, for which the frame and conſtitution of things diſcover them to be intended. Thus the excellencies of the ſun are it's light, and genial heat, and enlivening influences upon *us*

and

and other habitable worlds. Thoſe of an houſe are not it's mere ſize, but it's conſtruction, and the conveniency of it's appartments for human ſervices. And the excellency of an horſe, is not mere ſtrength, but ſhape, and temper, and motions.

In like manner the *rational* part of the world has *it's* perfections, proper to it's nature as ſuch. *Man*, as a ſpirit, an intelligent being, capable of reflecting, of diſcerning and diſtinguiſhing things and perſons, and of comparing *them* and himſelf, and the relation of each to the other;---*He*, I ſay is to ſtudy and learn what *his* excellencies are: and his grand work is to endeavour after them.

There is a certain temper of mind, wherein the true grace, as well as happineſs, of our human nature muſt conſiſt. There are certain diſpoſitions of ſoul, and habits of action, which alone can procure the praiſe and felicity, the intended goodneſs and uſefulneſs, of ſuch a creature. Now this temper, or ſpirit, the wiſe man tells us, is to be attained by the right exerciſe of the *underſtanding*; that is, by a regular and careful improvement of *all* the powers and faculties of the rational mind: the prime and leading faculty

faculty being *here* uſed, to repreſent the *whole* rational powers.

In order to find the truth of which propoſition, let us inquire.

I. What this *underſtanding* is, about what objects it is concerned, and in what way it is exerciſed.

II. The admirable effects of it, in forming and governing the temper of our minds.

III. After what manner, and by what means, it does this. From all which, I ſhall draw a few plain and uſeful remarks.

I. Then; in the literal ſenſe, every man is born into the world with *underſtanding*: God has beſtowed more or leſs of it upon us all: it is what makes us men, and gives *name* to the whole ſpecies. But the mere gift of ſuch a natural faculty, is not the thing intended by the character in the text. It is not the bare faculty, but the due exerciſe and improvement of it, that either in common ſpeech, or in ſcripture language, denominates a *man of underſtanding*. The juſt idea of ſuch a perſon, muſt be taken from a conſideration of the *ſubjects* his underſtanding is employed upon, and the *uſes* to which he applies what he knows and underſtands.

It

It is a vaſt medley of things, that furniſhes matter for the thoughts and underſtandings of mankind. The far greater part of them, are things *external to us*, that do not immediately concern our proper ſelves---we can live without them, and are as wiſe, and as happy too, when we have them not. Of this kind are abundance of ſenſible pleaſures, and worldly gratifications; a great affluence of riches, and a ſuperiority in the poſts and offices and honours of life. The ways of arriving at theſe, engage the ſtudies, and fill the hearts and wiſhes, of perhaps more than half the world. But the underſtanding how to *get* them proves but a poor affair, without the underſtanding how to *uſe* them. Our purſuits after them, for the moſt part, are ſo far from bettering the mind of a man, or raiſing his temper and ſpirit either to peace within him, or good to thoſe about him, that they hurt and mar and ſpoil it. They are attended with deſires that are reſtleſs and unquiet, and with a thouſand croſſes and diſappointments that vex and torment us. And when we have reached the point we aimed at, how much have we gained? why, the art and power of indulging a multitude

of

of fooliſh inclinations, and taſting imaginary pleaſures; which, beſides the injury they often do to others, leave the man himſelf at laſt, juſt where they found him--in vanity and vexation of ſpirit. A rational mind ſhould look farther, and higher: and if *this* be all, it is ſtill far ſhort of it's true excellency. To *underſtand the world*, as we commonly term it, is frequently little more, than to be a ſpectator, or a partaker, of it's follies and miſeries. And to underſtand how to get the wealth and preferments of it, is indeed to learn how to get *that*, with which we *may* do a great deal of good to ourſelves and others; but which, without ſome other principle beſides this worldly wiſdom to guide and direct us, we generally pervert to do more miſchief to both.

If any accompliſhment of mere human knowledge can claim the title of that underſtanding, which adorns and enriches the mind of man; it may ſeem to be the knowledge of ingenuous arts, and liberal ſciences;---the knowledge of nature, and the diſcoveries of philoſophy. Theſe are noble ſpeculations; and many of them reduced to *practiſe*, are of ſignal advantage both to private

and

and publick life. The theory of them is exceedingly pleaſing to the mind; and the application of them, frequently becomes a bleſſing to a nation. But even in the philoſopher, there are ſome other qualities requiſite to render his knowledge really advantageous to himſelf, or beneficial to the world around him. Speculation, ſingle and by itſelf, is a dry and a lifeleſs thing: it may often dwell in a moroſe, and ſour breaſt: and human learning has been ſeen to thrive in many an ingenious head, that has had an heart belonging to it, envious and haughty and unſociable.

Nay, once more; the underſtanding even of *religious* matters; an extenſive knowledge even of the nature of God, of his word and his will, is not the thing that, of itſelf alone, deſerves this character. For bare ſpeculative religion is not better (not to ſay, it is far worſe) than contemplative learning. And it is by no means impoſſible to find the man, who is both ſpiritually learned, and ſpiritually proud; or who knows a great deal more of his Maker and his duty than other men, and yet takes care to *practiſe* a great deal leſs.

Well

Well then---to finiſh this firſt inquiry---what is there ſtill wanting to all other ſorts of knowledge, to conſtitute the man of *true underſtanding* in the ſcripture ſenſe, and indeed in the only proper meaning, of that expreſſion?

In few words then, Solomon's phraſe of *underſtanding*, ſignifies the underſtanding and conſideration of *ourſelves*, of our obligations and conduct as *moral* men. His doctrine is, that our knowledge of all other matters, ſhould be made inſtrumental towards attaining a juſt and reverential idea of the ſupreme and infinite Author of all things: that to fix in our hearts the love and fear of God, with a ſerious apprehenſion of our dependence upon him, and of the behaviour that becomes us as rational and ſocial creatures, and to reduce theſe principles into an habitual courſe of virtuous action;---that this, I ſay, is the great end of all true learning, and the perfection of all ſound and manly underſtanding. This it is, which the ſcriptures diſtinguiſh by the title of *wiſdom*; becauſe it is the only knowledge that can render a man acceptable to his Creator, ſerviceable to his fellow creatures, and eaſy to himſelf,

himſelf, by producing in his mind thoſe diſpoſitions and inclinations, in which it's higheſt worth and beauty conſiſt. And therefore when this great moraliſt had reckoned up all the accompliſhments of the *natural man*, he found "the concluſion of the "whole matter to be this, fear God, and "keep his commandments, for this is the "whole of man"---'it is *that* which crowns 'all his other articles of knowledge, and 'forms the complete man.'

In what inſtances it does ſo, I am in the ſecond place to conſider.

II. Perſonal excellencies have relation either immediately to a man's ſelf, or to the eſteem and benefit of others. With reſpect to the man himſelf, the meaning of an "ex-"cellent ſpirit" is, a mind inwardly ſatisfied, contented, and happy; not in preſent airy notions, and fanciful conceits, that as ſoon paſs away as they find entrance; but from what it feels within itſelf, whenever it reflects on it's own principles and affections---an happineſs ſteady and permanent, becauſe natural. Now this is the never-failing effect of that true piety, which is termed in ſcripture *wiſdom* and *underſtanding*. For where-

ever

over there is a conviction of duty, of a law obliging a man to conſult the honour of his nature in all that he does and deſigns, and a conſciouſneſs of having actually conformed to this law; *there* muſt be content, *there* cannot be any thing but peace: ſince from hence ariſes every character of real and rational ſelf-enjoyment.

1. A juſt and due command of all the *paſſions*.

The Almighty creator, who made *reaſon* our firſt and governing principle, has alſo implanted within us the ſeveral *paſſions*, to give a ſpring and ſpirit to the mind in her purſuit of worthy thoughts and actions, and to increaſe her averſion to what is miſchievous and ſinful. Whenever theſe paſſions are indulged till they gain the aſcendancy over our better powers, the man is beneath himſelf: he feels the heavy hands of his tyrants: and what he ſeeks as pleaſures, become his torments. But the mind that underſtands itſelf, takes care to govern itſelf; places the government in right hands; and uſes the lower faculties as *miniſters* to its eaſe, its virtue, and its intereſt. And when to a ſenſe

of its intereſt, it adds that of gratitude and obligation to its Creator, and a conſcientious regard to his will and commands: its diligence is ſtill increaſed, and the ſatisfaction reſulting from it is increaſed in proportion. You then ſee the man in his truly rational and improved ſtate:-----a man who **rejoices* in that only, which is good for him; and deſpiſes whatever would tempt him with falſe and hurtful enjoyment:----who is indeed †*afraid* of entring, or being drawn into a wrong and unbecoming action; but is bold and brave above all men, in acting or ſuffering in a good cauſe:----a man who can be ‡*angry*, only as far as reſentment is decent and needful; and can overlook and forgive thoſe failings in his fellow creatures, which the folly of many others would prompt *them* to revenge:-----and, to ſay no more, who §*hopes* for nothing, but what is well grounded, and worthy of a wiſe expectation; and ‖*grieves* for nothing, more or longer, than the value of it will juſtify.

* Joy. † Fear. ‡ Anger. § Hope ‖ Grief.

Here

Here, now is peace indeed! This is the mind, that is happy in itſelf, and it's own juſt ſentiments: and the wiſdom of it's conduct, can not but be the moſt lovely ſight, as well as the beſt example, to all that behold it.

2. Another inſtance wherein the "man "of underſtanding" diſcovers the "excel- "lency of his ſpirit", is 'the prudent ma- 'nagement of himſelf under the proſperous 'or adverſe turns of fortune in the preſent 'life'.

In this firſt ſtage of our being, we are ſet into a world, where a mixture of pleaſure and pain, of good and evil, is diſperſed around by the ſame divine providence, to prove and to exerciſe us. To eſtimate and uſe theſe aright, is what muſt qualify us for the bleſſings of a higher ſtate, and give us true content while we remain in the preſent one. Weak and injudicious minds, that can taſte no enjoyment but what their ſenſes adminiſter, graſp at all temporal good with an eager hand, and place their felicity in the poſſeſſion, and their miſery in the abſence of it. Thus they are elate and wretched by

turns, and are at the mercy of every accident to make them either the one or the other.

The perſon who truly knows the world by truly underſtanding himſelf and his duty, proceeds by another method. He always carries his ſcales in his hand, weighs the good that is before him, and gives it no more eſteem than the intrinſic of it amounts to. He that aims at the life of reaſon, will be cautious not to let ſenſual pleaſures take too cloſe hold on his affections. He, whoſe eye is fixed upon another life, will never overcharge his heart with the ſuperfluous cares and anxieties of the preſent one. And this is the man, whom you will ever obſerve to bear both fortunes with dignity; to be proſperous, without an haughty look; and to be reduced to meaner circumſtances, without meaneſs of ſoul, or poverty of ſpirit; to feel but little pain from a diſappointment, that would utterly ſink an ambitious mind; and to be ſtill humble, gentle, and condeſcending, amidſt all the grandeur that would blow up the pride, and turn the head, and ſpoil the whole temper, of a man of *this world*.

3. The

3. The excellence of a pious underſtanding is ſeen, and cannot but be admired, in every branch of its *conduct towards others*; - - - in the very opinion ſuch a perſon entertains of his neighbour's merit, or accompliſhments; always attended with candour, with healing thoughts, and a charitable conſtruction. He that is ſenſible of his duty, is never inſenſible of his infirmities; and knowing and conſidering himſelf to be but a man, will treat every neighbour, and every neighbour's caſe, with the tender compaſſion which humanity calls for.

From compaſſion the good man riſes to benevolence, and generous action to all that lie within the ſphere of his power. His reverence of God cauſes him to embrace with affection and good-will all that bear the image of God. He beholds himſelf, and his own nature, in every other man; is above the little diſtinctions that are formed by prejudice and party; and ſtrives to imitate the God who is over all, by being a friend to all.

To ſum up his amiable properties at once; --he is wiſe for himſelf, out of love to his *real* ſelf; he ſerves his country, from public

principle; and particular men, from the delight he takes in doing good, from the conſideration that God requires it, and will reward it.

There are yet many particulars, belonging to theſe general excellencies, in the ſpirit of the good man I have been deſcribing. The ſincerity and "ſingleneſs of heart", the meekneſs and modeſty, that are inſeparable qualities of a truly pious diſpoſition, heighten all its charms, and endear the perſon that poſſeſſes them.

Such virtue is like the light of the ſun (the moſt pure and perfect of all other) not ſhut up within itſelf, but univerſally diffuſive and beneficial. What enlargement would theſe topics be capable of! But I will detain you no longer, than juſt to aſk the following queſtion----- 'whether the very imperfect 'ſketch, even the rough draught, I have *here* 'given you of this deſireable character, does 'not incline you to wiſh you were worthy of 'it *yourſelves*, or at leaſt that you could find it 'in *every human creature about you*'? And if *you*, in return, have *another* query to propoſe; namely, 'though the man of underſtanding

'is

'is allowed to be the moſt finiſhed character,
'and the happieſt of men; yet why muſt
'*piety* alone be graced with this title, why is
'*religion* the only means of attaining this ex-
'cellency of ſpirit';---I ſhall endeavour to
ſatisfy this inquiry in a ſecond diſcourſe.

To God only wiſe.---

SERMON IX.

PROVERBS 17. 27.

A man of underſtanding is of an excellent ſpirit.

MY firſt inquiry upon this ſubject was, 'what is the *underſtanding* to which 'the wiſe man aſcribes this noble influence 'upon the temper and ſpirit of a man: what 'is the *knowledge* he is to learn and acquire, 'in order to arrive at this character'.

I have obſerved to you, that it is not the mere common faculty of *reaſon* or *underſtanding*, which is here meant; becauſe all men have more or leſs of *this gift*; and yet too many are found to make little or no improvement of it.

Nor, is it *worldly* knowledge---which frequently degenerates into ſecular craft, and knaviſh

knaviſh arts to over-reach and outwit other men; and ſo renders their tempers far worſe, inſtead of bettering or refining them.

Nor, again, is it mere ſuperiority in *learning*, or ſkill in arts and ſciences: for much learning is often ſeen to dwell in a ſour breaſt, and with a moroſe ſpirit.

Nay, laſtly, it is not the bare knowledge of *religious* matters, nor the *underſtanding only* of *divine* things, that always produces this happy effect---of ſweetning the tempers, and giving all agreeable qualities to the minds of men: ſince a man may know a great deal, and be good for very little; and may underſtand much himſelf, and yet uſe his talents in ſo reſerved, uninſtructive, and unpleaſing a manner, as to make them of ſo ſmall benefit to other men.

The thing therefore intended by Solomon's word *underſtanding*, is the virtuous and divine art of *underſtanding ourſelves*: a right ſenſe of our own frame and conſtitution, of our duties and obligations as moral and ſocial creatures: a juſt apprehenſion of our Creator, and of the deſigns of his providence in giving us our being, and putting us into the preſent world.

This

This the ſcriptures emphatically ſtile *wiſdom, knowledge, diſcretion, underſtanding*; that is, ſuch a principle of heart as will direct and regulate a man's *actions*, in every inſtance of conduct that is worthy of his rational nature, and of the relation he bears both to his Maker, and to all his fellow creatures and fellow ſubjects around him.

In ſuch a principle and behaviour I have ſhewn to conſiſt, and by it to be procured, all that inward peace and contentment, that command of the paſſions and affections, that wiſe eſteem of the bleſſings and evils of the preſent life, and that benignity and benevolence to our neighbour, which conſtitute the true beauty and perfection of the ſpirit of a man.

III. The remaining inquiry is what *now* calls upon me to ſhew you, why '*that* which 'we name *piety* or *religion*, is the only means, 'by which a man can attain to this moſt de-'ſirable ſtate of mind'. It may be demanded why the mere ſight and conviction of what is fit and reaſonable, ſhould not be alone ſufficient to induce men to purſue it: why the very pleaſure of virtue, ſhould not be motive enough to keep us virtuous; and our natural

taſte

taſte of wiſdom and beauty, cauſe us continually to endeavour to render ourſelves and our conduct wiſe and beautiful? There may ſeem, in ſhort, to be no other obligation wanting, beſides that moral knowledge, that moral ſenſe of good and evil, which diſtinguiſhes us from the brutes.

Now it is certain that whatever is in itſelf right and excellent, will remain ſo, and muſt appear ſo to every intelligent creature, without any command from any foreign power for eſteeming it ſuch. For as light and heat and colours and ſounds are uniformly felt and judged of by us, without any law beſides that of ſenſe and nature, to direct our judgment about them; ſo in like manner the moral virtues, veracity, juſtice, temperance, and benevolence, carry their own evidence along with them, are their own motive, and have their own reward, *provided nothing comes with unnatural violence to deprive them of that reward.* But here lies the conſideration of the real and actual ſtate of mankind, in this life of trial and imperfection. We have a "law of our minds"; and a right and juſt law it is; a rule of undeniable truth and rectitude. But have we not alſo a "law of our

"members

"members, warring againſt this law of our minds, and often bringing it into captivity"? We have *reaſon* indeed, to ſhew us what are proper excellencies of our nature; but we have *paſſions* too, that are apt to cloud and deceive and pervert it. We have a plain way before us, but what a world have we about us; how many thouſand allurements, how many ſtrong temptations, how many powerful examples, to ſeduce and draw us out of it!

In urgent and difficult caſes, where virtue cannot be its own immediate reward, but brings upon us preſent pain and loſſes and diſgrace, by the wicked treatment of other men; can you ſay there is no higher principle wanting to ſecure to a man the good temper and reſolution of his mind---to guide and influence his *practical* underſtanding, and to conſummate his character? How has the fact been, in all ages of time? How many brave ſpirits have yielded up their fortitude, at the ſight of torments, and the threatnings of miſery? How many have been overcome and broken by perſecution? And what has the majority of mere *natural* men been doing

for

for thouſands of years paſt, but proſtituting their reaſon to their paſſions, and enſlaving their better powers to worldly and ſenſual deſires?

In plain truth, the cauſe of thoſe virtues that are the perfection of the ſoul, is in a poor and hopeleſs condition, if a man has nothing higher than temporal views, if he feels no ſuperior obligation upon him for the practice of them! Vice, which is the depravity of the mind, would flow in upon us like a deluge, were there no conſcience, no fear of God and of his righteous judgments, to reſtrain its fury. How can you ſuppoſe a paſſionate and mortal creature to preſerve his integrity, if it muſt often be done with great labour in this life, and without all proſpect of any recompence for it in another? With what ſpirit could you ſtrive againſt the reigning corruptions of the world, were it your only expectation to ſuffer from evil men *here*, and to have nothing more than the worſt of them *hereafter*?

Upon the whole; *good temper* and *humanity* may be, and often are, the ſource of many generous actions; which, wherever they are found

found, ought never to paſs without their juſt commendation: but the ſteady courſe of a virtuous life, uniform in all its parts, proof againſt all difficulties and temptations;---- *this* can be eſtabliſhed on no other foundation than that of a firm belief of a future ſtate, and a firm perſuaſion that "God will "render to every man according to his "works".

So that without any neceſſity of entring into a nice inquiry, 'whether it may not 'have been, or may not ſtill be poſſible, 'that ſome *particular* men, of great minds 'and ſtrong natural courage, may (upon the 'ſtrength of that *mere courage)* perſiſt in ſpite 'of all temptations, in the virtues that adorn 'our human nature'; it is enough if this cannot be affirmed of the *bulk of mankind*, nor be fairly expected from them.

But change the queſtion now, and imagine a perſon to view himſelf in the character of a rational Being, the creature and ſubject of an all-wiſe and Almighty Creator; formed with powers of free thought and action, to imitate the perfections, and obey the will, of his Maker; placed in ſociety to do good to his

his fellow creatures, and to be proved and exerciſed by various trials; with the certain proſpect of a glorious and eternal reward of his faithful ſervices;----from a man, I ſay, thus circumſtanced, what improvements may you not look for, what pious fortitude, what excellency of ſpirit! The aſſurance he has, that his duty and his happineſs are thus inviolably united, will animate him with inceſſant zeal to cultivate every virtue, that can be an ornament to himſelf, or a benefit to others. The pattern he is to follow, will ſet him above all influence from the examples of weak and corrupted men. Divine goodneſs is his example, and to copy *that* the grand object of his conduct. The love he bears to mankind will be univerſal, "without partiality, and without hypocriſy"; becauſe he conſiders them all as his brethren, the children and ſervants of the ſame heavenly Father. A man like this, whoſe confidence is placed in a world to come, has an heart too great, a view too noble, to commit a mean, much more an injurious action, to gain any of the honours or profits of the preſent one.

To

To have hope in "the Lord of all things", though it will not render you incapable of preſent pain and evil, will afford you the trueſt ſupport and comfort under them; and make you ſcorn to be broken by the weight of thoſe afflictions, that would quite cruſh another man: though it will not exempt you from thoſe trials "of which all are partakers", it will inſpire you with reſolution to reſiſt and to overcome them.

This is the man, whom if you ſee ſurrounded with the choiceſt of earthly bleſſings, with the means of gratifying every worldly and ſenſual deſire; yet you will find him moderate in the enjoyment of them all. If you behold him exalted to the higheſt ſtations of power, you will obſerve him ſtill mild and affable, where other men would domineer; candid and merciful to thoſe offences, upon which a man of a different ſpirit would let fly his reſentment with a moſt terrible advantage.

And, in few words, make it your obſervation, if ever you ſaw, or heard or read of, a great and good man, who without a ſerious belief in God and a future ſtate, did

actually rule his own ſpirit; who was generous and ſincere, in all his pretenſions and tranſactions; who was as chaſte in the ſecret chamber, as in the open market place; who abhorred a private villainy, as much as the public infamy of it; who, in ſhort, did not act the politic, rather than the good man; who had it in his power to commit a fraud that would make his fortune with a good grace and without all poſſibility of a diſcovery, but was as conſcientious in doing right to the moſt ignorant, and under this utmoſt advantage of concealment, as if the eyes of the whole world had been upon him. This is indeed *perfection of ſoul*, and "excellence "of ſpirit"; but then it is the effect of true piety, of a principle infinitely higher than mere natural temper, or worldly policy, or any other knowledge, but the knowledge of ourſelves and of God our Creator and lawgiver, can ever pretend to be.

I will finiſh this ſubject with one or two reflections, which I conceive to be the moſt proper *application* I can make of what has been ſaid upon it.

And,

And, 1. If piety, or the knowledge and practice of religion, be the perfection of the human mind; I may ſafely venture to ſay, that *chriſtian* piety is particularly and eſpecially ſo. If it be ſo very difficult (if not altogether impoſſible) to be a valuable, or even a truly *agreeable* man, without a due ſenſe of God, of our relation to him and expectations from him;---if ſerious and devout apprehenſions of him, and of the obligations we are under to reverence and obey him, have ſuch an admirable effect upon our tempers and conduct;----how happy muſt be the influences of *that* religion, which is not laboured out of our own mere reaſonings and concluſions, but is delivered to us in authentic expreſſes from heaven itſelf! A religion, wherein God is ſet forth to us under every amiable and auguſt idea, of infinite majeſty, wiſdom and goodneſs; wherein every moral duty is laid before us in its native plainneſs and ſimplicity, and at the ſame time is enforced by ſuch powerful ſanctions, by ſuch "exceeding great and precious promiſes" of reward, and ſuch juſt terrors of puniſhment, as cannot fail to induce every ſincere believer to endeavour after the attain-

ment of all thoſe graces, that are to recommend him to his Maker, endear him to his fellow creatures, and procure his eternal felicity. If ſuch be the religion of the goſpel; aſk yourſelves whether the moſt intenſe regard you can pay to it, be not your higheſt wiſdom and underſtanding?

2. While we are attributing theſe excellent influences upon the mind of man, to piety and chriſtianity; the very nature of the ſubject will call upon you to remember, that we can mean it only of *rational* and *ſcriptural* piety, of *genuine* and *uncorrupt* chriſtianity. It is not every ſyſtem and ſcheme of religion, wrought out of the politicks of ſome, or the fancy and imagination of others, and then propagated with the zeal and fury of either, that will give any man this glorious conduct of his own ſpirit. Real piety is the golden mean betwixt Atheiſm on the one hand, and Superſtition on the other: of which two evils it is no eaſy matter to ſay, whether is the more pernicious. The one bids defiance to ſacred things; the other makes them ridiculous, and is very often ſo far from being an error on the *right ſide*, that a raging enthuſiaſt, inſtead of improving his ſpirit by his religion,

religion, totally forgets "what manner of "ſpirit he is of."

3. Therefore; let us here remark a plain and unerring rule, whereby we may all try ourſelves, and learn what progreſs we have made in religion, and what ſtate we are in. The text teaches you to judge of your mind, as you would of a tree in your garden: "by it's *fruits* you are to know it". If you think (as I ſuppoſe moſt men do) that *your* religious profeſſion excells all others; aſk and examine what excellencies you yourſelves have attained by it. Obſerve and ſee, "whether "it may not perhaps be very good in *itſelf*, "and yet be made worth very little to *you*, "by your ill improvement of it". Has it wrought in you the divine and ſocial virtues? Has it formed in you the image of your God and Saviour, in the righteouſneſs, meekneſs, humility, mercy, and all good nature? Has it ſweetened your tempers, and ſoftened your ſpirit into ſincere tenderneſs to all men, out of honour to God whoſe creatures and children they all are? Or has it not left you ſtill cenſorious, ſour, ſelfiſh, and uncharitable? If it has, depend upon it "God is not

"to be mocked", though *you* may deceive *yourſelves*.

If you imagine your hearts to be ſanctified by believing at random what you do not underſtand, or ſuffering others to believe and to live *for* you;---if you meaſure your religion by the length of your creed, not by the number of your good works;---or if you calculate your holineſs by rounds of devotion, by a circulation of ſtated prayers, or frequency of ſacraments *only*, without the *power* of this godlineſs along with the *forms* of it;---in all theſe caſes you abuſe the good means, ann utterly loſe the end. You have none of that ſpirit in you, which is the fruit of *underſtanding*; but are upon the level with a *fooliſh* huſbandman, who makes a great boaſting of his vineyard, without cultivating any good plants in it: and when autumn comes, he has nothing to do but to go and try whether he can "gather grapes of thorns, "or figs of thiſtles".

To God only wiſe,

SERMON

SERMON X.

ROMANS ii. 7.

To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.

ST. Paul, in this epiſtolary diſcourſe, had two oppoſite and very bitter parties of men to deal with---the jewiſh and gentile converts. The ſubject of their contention was "what were the fundamentals requiſite "to make a man a true chriſtian, according "to the goſpel ſcheme": and ſo wide was the difference between them, that there ſeems to have been but one thing (and that a very bad one) wherein they perfectly agreed; namely, the judging and condemning one another without the leaſt tenderneſs or generoſity.

To cure them of this evil, and to make way for the chriſtian ſpirit amongſt them, the apoſtle, in theſe two firſt chapters, takes the moſt effectual method that could be; by laying before them the many enormous vices, they had *each* been guilty of: thereby to ſhame them *both* into the acknowledgement of this concluſion--- "that *they*, of all "men, are the moſt improper perſons to ſit "in judgment upon the principles and ſpiri-"tual eſtate of their brethren, who are in "the worſt condition themſelves": and it is the impudence of wickedneſs, for creatures deſtitute of *common morality*, to ſet themſelves up for flaming zealots in the cauſe of *God*, and to mark out for others the boundaries of truth, and the limits of ſalvation. "Thou "art therefore inexcuſable, O man, whoſo-"ever thou art that judgeſt: for wherein "thou judgeſt another, thou condemneſt "thyſelf."

Inſtead then of this unjuſt procedure againſt each other, St. Paul endeavours to fix their thoughts upon that more equitable and righteous judgment which we are *all* to undergo at the future tribunal of *God*; when an eternal period ſhall be put to all our uncharitable

charitable diſputes; when the merits of every cauſe ſhall be laid open, and a reward be given to every man, not according to the angry cenſures or imperious determinations of his fellow ſervants, but according to his own works; when, in fine, the ſpirit of cenſoriouſneſs will be found to be that finiſhing degree of wickedneſs, which will treaſure up wrath for us againſt that day of wrath; and the only claim to that eternal life we all hope for, will appear to be "a patient continuance in well-doing".

This was the occaſion, and is the connection, of theſe words. And how much the ſerious conſideration of the argument contained in them, is wanted at this time, * is what I leave to be lamented by all ſuch as have any regard for real and ſolid chriſtianity.

The text naturally leads us to obſerve,

I. The *duty* here required as a qualification for the reward propoſed; viz. *well-doing*, and a *patient continuance in it*.

II. The

* This refers to the late religious controverſies, which were prevalent at the time this ſermon was written.

II. The *reward itſelf* under the character of *life*, attended with the happy and noble circumſtances of *glory*, *honour* and *immortality*.

III. How abundantly ſufficient this reward is, to engage us to the careful practice of the duty enjoined.

I. The expreſſion of *well-doing* is uſed in ſcripture either in a limited, or a more extenſive acceptation. It ſometimes denotes the *whole* of a virtuous life, and a general courſe of action ſuitable to the religion of the goſpel. At other times, it is made the characteriſtic of ſome particular duties, eminent for their value and importance.

Honeſt *induſtry*, and a quiet and careful attention to the proper work of our reſpective callings, in oppoſition to the buſy, diſorderly, and factious temper of too many, is thus named by St. Paul in his ſecond epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, where he exhorts them "not to be weary in *well-doing*"---as the context clearly ſhews.

Submiſſion to our *earthly* governors, has this ſpecial title given to it by St. Peter, in his firſt epiſtle; where, obſerving the odious calumny

calumny which the enemies of the chriſtians were wont to throw upon them, as a ſet of people *diſaffected to the Roman government*, he exhorts them to "have their converſation "honeſt among the gentiles; that whereas "they ſpeak againſt you as *evil doers*", as ſeditiouſly and rebelliouſly diſpoſed, "they "may by your good works", by your peaceableneſs and loyalty, "which they ſhall be-"hold, glorify God. For ſo is the will of "God, that by *well-doing*" by obedience to them that bear rule over you, "ye may put "to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men".

Farther; this phraſe is particularly uſed of the virtue of *humanity*, or *charity*. That comprehenſive duty is deſcribed as carrying in it the idea of all *good*; and the practice of it is with peculiar emphaſis ſtiled *doing good*. In this notion our bleſſed Saviour is ſaid to have "gone about *doing good*", that is, doing acts of mercy, ſuch as healing the ſick, caſting out devils, and the like. And, in the ſame ſenſe, he demanded of the Phariſees, whether "it were lawful to *do good* on "the ſabbath day"; and commands us to "*do good*", that is to *lend*, "hoping for no-

"thing

"thing again". So *God* is ſaid to *do good* to us all, "filling our hearts with food and "gladneſs". Such is the character of this virtue, which proceeds from a principle ſo noble and great, ſo conformable to the ſupreme pattern of goodneſs and all perfection.

But laſtly; the apoſtle ſeems to *me* to have intended, by the expreſſion in *our text*, to denote the firſt and fundamental virtue of *the love of truth*, or a conſcientious inquiry into the evidences of *religion* and the *will of God*; free from prejudice, paſſion, and the influences of worldly motives. For the *well-doing* in this verſe, ſtands oppoſed to the temper deſcribed in the next; namely, that of "be-"ing contentious, and not *obeying the truth*, "but obeying unrighteouſneſs"----of an ignorant and raging zeal for doctrines, that are ſupported by mere cuſtom and human authority; that never came from God, and tend only to the temporal emolument of the men that promote them.

And thus does the goſpel of Chriſt recommend itſelf as worthy of all acceptation, in the very nature of its demands upon mankind;---by making religion, in the practi-

cal

cal part, to conſiſt in the exerciſe of ſuch moral duties as are indiſpenſably needful towards both the private and public happineſs of human life; and by requring no more of the ſpeculative branch, than a diligent and impartial ſearch after the true mind of God in all things.

Of a quite contrary ſpirit were the perſons for whoſe reformation this epiſtle to the Romans was written. The *jewiſh* chriſtians, educated in the ſchools of the Phariſees, ſtrove hard for the traditions of their mother-church; and reſolutely concluded that nothing could be *truth*, which deſtroyed any of the maxims, or reflected upon the credit, of their old maſters. The *gentile* converts had lived under their prieſts, and had imbibed the wiſdom of their philoſophers alſo; and were thence *as* hard to be drawn from *their* errors, to ſubmit to the ſimplicity of the goſpel.

With theſe difficulties our bleſſed Saviour's *own* miniſtry was attended. He came into the world for this purpoſe, "that he might "bear witneſs unto the truth"; which drew upon him the "contradiction of ſinners". "Have any of the *rulers* or of the *phariſees* "believed on him", was made the grand objection

objection to his doctrine, after he had confirmed it by reaſon, by ſcripture, and by miracles. His apoſtles and firſt miniſters were repreſented as "ſetters forth of ſtrange "Gods", merely becauſe falſe and idolatrous worſhip had long prevailed. And indeed, as chriſtianity itſelf was a reformation of the groſs corruptions ariſing from the wickedneſs and ſtupid negligence of thoſe who, for ſo many ages, had been deceiving others, and ſuffering themſelves to be deceived, in matters of religion; and could not well be expected to meet with a better reception from a contentious world not diſpoſed to "obey "the truth"----ſo, I ſay, *every* ſincere endeavour to rectify abuſes in any age whatever even among *chriſtians*, muſt generally ſhare a ſimilar fate: and the authors of it, though never ſo like their bleſſed Maſter in the love of God and of his truth, and in that charity to mankind which is the very bond of peace, will be branded like *Him* and his apoſtles with the reproachful terms of *innovators*, and "ſuch as come to turn the world "upſide down".

In ſhort, this generous love of truth, as it regards the faith and *principles of our minds*,

is

is the prime and leading inſtance of "well-"doing"; and requires the moſt unſhaken reſolution and "patient continuance", to ſupport us in the *practice* of it. This has ever been the trial and the triumph of truly great and good minds; that has made them, what our holy profeſſion obliges them to be, "the "the ſalt of the earth, and the light of the "world". And for this (or elſe for nothing) is propoſed that reward of eternal life, which I come now to conſider.

II. The reward of virtuous men in the future ſtate, is in *general* repreſented by the phraſe of *life*, and *entering into life*---into a ſtate of exiſtence that deſerves indeed the name of *life*, in oppoſition to that imperfect and low degree of it *we* now lead in the fleſh; limited to the narrow compaſs of a few ſenſes, the ſtrong and numerous impreſſions whereof do ſo forcibly divert us from our beſt purſuits, and preſs down the mind from attaining her true and proper accompliſhments.

And ſo incapable are we at preſent of riſing any higher than theſe ſame impreſſions, and our own ſpeculations and refinements upon them, will carry us; that the holy

holy ſcriptures are obliged to repreſent the future life to us by ſuch *figures* and *compariſons*, as ſerve in ſome meaſure to ſet forth its greatneſs, but not its adequate and full notion. In the mean time, the trueſt conception we can form of it, muſt be drawn from the conſideration of thoſe *moral graces*, that are the ornament, and conſequently the happineſs, of every reaſonable Being: ---- "from reflecting on the *duties* required of us "in this life, we get the beſt idea of the *fe*- "*licity* of the next".

The plaineſt promiſes relating to that heavenly ſtate are, that "we ſhall be as the *an*- "*gels*", that "we ſhall *ſee God*", and "be "*like* him": whence it evidently appears, that it will chiefly conſiſt in the advancement of the *ſoul*; and of thoſe rational powers, by a right uſe of which we are trained up in virtue *here*, in conformity to the ſupreme pattern of goodneſs, whereof we were created the imperfect images; and, in reward of that virtue, ſhall *hereafter* be raiſed to a ſtill far higher and more bleſſed ſimilitude of the infinite original.

Thus, when our *underſtandings*, now ſo fallible and confined, ſhall have their capacity enlarged,

enlarged, and a more ſpacious field of truths laid open to them;---when our *wills*, now ſo prone to irregularity and vice, ſhall be ſteady in the purſuit of their proper good, and be no longer with-held from it by ignorance, prejudice, or paſſion;---*then* ſhall we *live* indeed: and as we ſhall then anſwer the trueſt ends of life, we muſt needs enjoy its trueſt pleaſures.

And this, at the ſame time, ſhews you to *whom*, and to what *ſort* of men, this bliſs can *only* belong. The object of the *underſtanding* is truth, and the various natures and relations of things: the object of the *will* (free and unvitiated) is juſtice, righteouſneſs, and holineſs. *They* alone therefore, who are *lovers of truth*, are worthy to be filled with its delights from the fountain of all truth: they alone who "*have pleaſure* in righteouſneſs", can ever become members of that ſociety, whoſe bleſſing it ſhall be to go on from perfection to perfection in the univerſal love and exerciſe of it.

You ſee then, in the general idea, of what *kind* the future happineſs of pure and uncorrupt minds is to be. But we muſt take ſome notice of the three particular circum-

ſtances of it, as expreſſed in the text; *glory*, *honour*, and *immortality*.

The notions men at preſent conceive of *glory*, are for the moſt part exceedingly vain and ſuperficial. A great abundance of riches, an elevated ſtation, a pompous pre-eminence above others, an arbitrary command of things and perſons;---*theſe* are what uſually anſwer the meaning of this word. And theſe, while they are the promiſcuous lot of the leaſt as well as the beſt accompliſhed men; while, at their higheſt tide, they are incommenſurate to the noble aſpirings of a rational ſoul; changeable as the world we live in; and ſhort, frequently ſhorter than life itſelf;--- are yet generally graſped at with an eagerneſs of ambition, far above their worth; and are often obtained by unjuſt and unequal meaſures. Thus men ſhine with plumes, that are but ſpoils ſnatched from others; that have no connection with their real ſelves; and which, even as ſoon as attained, either leave *us*, or *we* leave *them!*

But the glories of the future world are of quite another kind, whether you conſider of what they are to conſiſt, or by what means they are to be purchaſed. For *they* will be ſuch

ſuch ornaments as ſtrictly belong to us, ſuch as are *within* us, and properly our own; even the perfection of the mind itſelf, and of all thoſe qualities that lift it up to the reſemblance of the "*Father* of ſpirits". For this, and this only, can be ſtiled true ambition, and laſting glory--- "to be habitually deſirous "of what is eſſentially good, to ſee it clearly, "and to follow it uninterruptedly".

2. The next circumſtance is *honour*; by which I here underſtand that eſteem, praiſe, and commendation, which others expreſs of our good actions and qualifications. How groſsly this alſo, both the *word* and the *thing*, is miſtaken by mankind in the preſent world, is but too obvious. Scarcely is there a thing ſo trivial, few things even of the worſt and loweſt kind, but what, ſome time or other, aſſume the character which, of all others, ſhould be freeſt from profanation. Victories and triumphs, though over the moſt innocent, and in never ſo vile a cauſe; impatience under a ſlight affront; revenge of injuries, and carving out juſtice for ourſelves in defiance of all law and government; the ſervile homages of inferiors in one ſenſe, though perhaps ſuperiors in all

others;---*theſe* are the matters, that are wont to challenge the title of *honour* and *greatneſs*. So men amuſe their own fancies; and the ſycophants about them, contribute to cheriſh thoſe paſſions, the very reverſe of which, when duly conſidered, are far more agreeable to their ſober judgments, and calm reflections.

The honours to be hereafter received for *well-doing*, will be totally different. The praiſes and eſteem we ſhall *then* find, will all be founded on real excellencies, and will proceed upon the rules of perfect reaſon. Infinitely ſuperior to all weak partiality, they will bear an exact proportion to the dignity of the actions we have done, and of the habitual diſpoſitions that adorn our minds. The victories to be *then* ſung, will be ſuch as are over enemies indeed; over ſin, ſatan, and a vicious world; nay, which is ſtill greater, over ourſelves:---conqueſts ſo truly glorious, that moſt of thoſe that have been gained over kingdoms and fenced cities, appear, upon the compariſon, contemptible and criminal.

Moreover; this *honour* is to be paid us, not by judges of popular paſſions and giddy apprehenſions,

apprehenſions, but of exquiſite wiſdom and unerring truth. For we ſhall be commended by Almighty God, the fountain of wiſdom; by thoſe celeſtial ſpirits, who excell in reaſon and purity; and by thoſe "juſt men made "perfect, who dwell in light" becauſe they loved the truth, and "patiently continued" in profeſſing and acting according to it.

And that which will complete this honour, and that indeed without which *all* honours are but mere vanities, is, that we ſhall be able to approve and value *ourſelves*, and to entertain the applauſes of others with the concurring teſtimony of our own hearts, and with an humble and delightful aſſurance that they are given us as our juſt and generous *reward*.

3. The laſt happy circumſtance of the heavenly life, is the *eternity* of it.

As the want of this circumſtance is really an advantage when applied to our preſent being (for who that has any taſte of rational life, would wiſh to abide for ever in a vicious and litigious world?) ſo the addition of it is what conſummates the future ſtate. Imagine your pleaſures never ſo pure, your perfections never ſo exalted; yet to hear of their *final period*, to know they will one day *abſolutely*

end, would much abate of their reliſh, and damp the enjoyment of them. But when their duration is adequate to the excellency of their nature, you have *then* the idea of finiſhed happineſs.

The good and wiſe God therefore, in love to thoſe who ſincerely love his truth, and "hold it in righteouſneſs", has laid up for them treaſures which he has made fully great, by making them inexhauſtible. He is pleaſed, for our faithful though imperfect ſervices, not only to beſtow on us a "weight of glo-"ry"; but, that it may be heaven indeed, he has promiſed it ſhall be "*eternal*".

III. To conclude then. Wiſdom itſelf could not have given us a more engaging argument to the practice of every thing that is praiſe-worthy, than we *now* have in the propoſals of the *goſpel*. God has exactly adapted our future recompence to our preſent duties, and condition of life: ſo that the difficulties we meet with, and paſs through *here*, are the very means that prepare and qualify us for proportionate meaſures of happineſs *hereafter*. His righteous providence, which made us intelligent creatures, has placed us in a field wherein we are to ſearch for *truth* amidſt many differences and diſputes about it, and

very ſad inſtances of deviation from it. Juſtly is this permitted, even among *chriſtians*; that ſo room may be left for rational choice, and for the exerciſe and reward of *that* virtue whereby *truth* is preferred above all things.

He has commanded us even to yield up life itſelf, in defence of his honour: but it is only that this ſame life may be returned to us again, more glorious, and more honourable.

Having therefore theſe promiſes, my brethren, let nothing be ſufficient to diſcourage you from that love of God, and regard to the truths of Chriſt Jeſus; and from that univerſal charity towards *men*, for *his* ſake; which in all ages of the church have been moſt effectual to ſave, though moſt neglected in practice. And let us not be ſervily conformed to *this* world, but endeavour to be "transformed continually in the renewing "of our minds", and the improvement of our judgments and underſtandings; that we may be daily more and more able to prove, and willing to perform, that and that only, which is the "good and acceptable and per-"fect will of God;" from whoſe abundant bounty we hope for "glory and honour and immortality".

To whom, only wiſe.---

SERMON XI.

MATTHEW iii. 8, 9.

Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. And think not to ſay within yourſelves, we have Abraham to our father: for I ſay unto you, that God is able of theſe ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham.

JOHN the Baptiſt was that meſſenger or forerunner of Chriſt, whom the prophets Iſaiah and Malachi foretold God Almighty would ſend, to give notice of his coming; to prepare mens minds for embracing the pure religion he was about to eſtabliſh; and to render them worthy ſubjects of that ſpiritual government, the laws of which were to have their influence upon our hearts, and the moral conduct of our lives.

Thus,

Thus, according to *Iſaiah*, he was to "prepare the way of the Lord, and to make "ſtrait in the deſert an highway for our God" ---alluding to the cuſtom of great and powerful *princes*, who, when they made any ſolemn march, or triumphal proceſſion, were wont to order the *roads* to be *cleared* and *levelled* for their eaſier paſſage. So, in like manner, our ſupreme Maſter expects, that all who deſire to enter into his heavenly kingdom, and hope for his final mercy and favour, ſhould cleanſe their hearts from all ſinful prejudices, from all worldly and carnal luſts; and ſhould receive and obey his commands, with ſubmiſſion and integrity. This is the *moral* of thoſe words, "let every val-"ley be exalted, and every mountain and "hill be made low; and the crooked be "made ſtraight, and the rough places plain".

Thus, again, this eminent preacher was to fulfill the character given of him by the prophet *Malachi*: "he was to turn the heart of "the fathers to the children, and the heart "of the children to the fathers": that is, he was to convert all orders and ranks of men, ---all, I mean, that *would be* converted, all that would hearken and learn, and were not obſtinately

obſtinately determined to perſiſt in their ignorance and immoralities. All ſuch he would "turn to the wiſdom of the juſt", or to true and ſaving religion.

Well; and what was the *doctrine*, by which he was thus to benefit mankind, and put them in the only way of being accepted of God through Chriſt our Saviour? Why, it was the plain and neceſſary doctrine of *repentance* and amendment of life, and the practice of moral virtue. It was the doctrine of "the "love of God, and our neighbour"---that natural, and effectual method of making men uſeful to others, and happy in themſelves---that only condition and preparative for the rewards of the goſpel, and the bleſſings of heaven---that very thing, which ſome people are ſo afraid ſhould be too little to ſave them, and yet ſo few can be perſuaded to endeavour after, and become maſters of! They that think it ſo little, can yet hardly ever be induced to *perform that little!*

The good Baptiſt knew of nothing elſe, requiſite either to bring a man to Chriſt at firſt, or to make him afterward live like a chriſtian. For when the ſeveral ſorts of people

people demanded of him 'what this reformation must be, with respect to their several particular professions, and business in the world'; his only reply was, that 'they should avoid the temptations, and follow the justice and honour, proper to their different situations and employments'.

To the *bulk of his hearers*, he prescribed benevolence, friendly action, and a readiness to assist each other: "let him that hath "two coats, impart to him that hath none; "and he that hath meat, let *him* do likewise". And when the *publicans*, or gatherers of the Roman taxes, inquired, "master, what shall *we* do"? "do not *exact*", says he, "do not *extort*: keep to the *law*, and "injure no man". And to the *soldiers*, whose great temptation was *rapine* and *plunder*, his lesson was, "do violence to no one, aud be "content with your *wages*"---'live quietly 'and honestly upon your *military pay*'.

Thus according to the Baptist's doctrine, the life of a christian is a life of virtue---- shewing itself in a behaviour suitable to the relations of *things* and *persons*, and encouraged and promoted by a sense of *God*,

by

by a belief of his divine providence, and the promiſes of his goſpel.

And it does not appear but that the people in general were perfectly ſatisfied with the terms propoſed to them by their new teacher, till the ſcribes and phariſees (thoſe blind guides, who firſt led the blind to place their hopes of God's favour in any thing ſooner than a faithful diſcharge of their duty) till *they*, I ſay, ſtept in, and put a ſtop to the progreſs of this ſalutary doctrine. For *they* had quite other notions of things. They expected their Meſſiah indeed, but expected he would ſave them, not *from* their ſins, but *in the midſt* of all their ſins. They looked upon themſelves as the *children of Abraham*, and the *choſen people of God*; and thought that Chriſt was to come on purpoſe to raiſe *them* and their nation to *temporal power* and *dominion*; and to work for them a ſalvation void of all conditions.

Such were the men, and ſuch their error and fatal deluſion, againſt which the words of the text were levelled. And had ſo preſumptuous an opinion infected none but Scribes and Phariſees, and died with *them*, and been heard of no more; happy would it

have

have been for us! But alas! men of all religions, even *chriſtians* of all denominations, have too frequently copied this unworthy example, in fooliſhly relying upon their Saviour and Redeemer, while they paid little or no regard to the moral commands of his goſpel. As theſe *Jews* depended ſolely on God's promiſe to Abraham, and on being the mere "ſeed of Abraham according to the "*fleſh*", without any care to inherit either his *faith* or his *works*;---ſo have *chriſtians* done in *their* religion, and ſo they do ſtill.

Give me leave, in what follows.

I. To lay before you ſome inſtances of this ſad miſtake among chriſtians in *general*.

II. To ſhew you how contrary it is to the whole divine word, and to all the diſpenſations and dealings of God with thoſe who have been called his church and people.

III. After which, it will be no difficult matter to apply what has been ſaid to ourſelves of this nation in *particular*.

I. Then I ſay, this jewiſh error, this dangerous vanity, of claiming divine favours and bleſſings merely on account of an *external relation* to God, and becauſe they live under the *covenant of his true religion*, has ſpread itſelf

even far

far and wide in the chriſtian world. It certainly began to do ſo, in the very earlieſt days of the goſpel. Our bleſſed Lord too viſibly foreſaw it, when he gave his followers this earneſt caution, that "many would call him "Lord and Maſter"---would pretend to acknowledge him, and to believe in him, and perhaps in *their way* be very *zealous* for him ---and yet "never *do the things* which he "enjoined them".

The apoſtles in *their* writings complain of many nominal chriſtians, who "profeſſed to "know God, but in *works* denied him": and the ancient *hereticks* (who were ſo called, not for barely *erroneous*, but for *wicked* opinions) *they* would allow nobody to have ſuch an intereſt in Chriſt as themſelves; though, of all men, *they* were the fartheſt from him.

The times nearer to our own, will ſupply you with ſtill more numerous examples. In all the nations around us, ſubject to the *poliſh* ſuperſtition, the great majority of the people verily think themſelves the *only* members of the *one true* catholic church; *out of* which there can be no poſſible ſalvation, but *in* which a very little matter will be ſufficient

to

to render them abſolutely ſecure of it. And how ſhould they think otherwiſe, if they can once be brought to believe, that Chriſt beſtowed on St. Peter an unlimited privilege of *infallibility*----of retaining and remitting the ſins of men;---and that from *him* their popes, and from *them* their prieſts, are ſucceſſors to theſe vaſt powers and prerogatives? Hence are mens ſins and vices, without being at all forſaken, without any "fruits meet for repentance", only confeſſed, and then abſolved; committed again, and again abſolved! And juſt as the Scribes and Phariſees were uſed to plead, "we "have Abraham to our father"; ſo theſe deluded creatures ſay in their hearts, "the "pope, the grand vicar of Chriſt, is our un-"erring father and guide; and the infalli-"ble church is our ſecurity".

But, allowing this to be the caſe with *papiſts*; yet who can there be amongſt *us* of the proteſtant, the *reformed* name, upon whom ſuch an accuſation can juſtly be laid, or that can fairly be ſuppoſed chargeable with the unchriſtian error cenſured in the text? I anſwer, every one of us, who founds his

confidence, and places his merit, in the bare outward privileges of his profeſſion; who fancies himſelf intitled to the ſpiritual bleſſings of *God*, becauſe he has the happineſs of being baptized into the covenant of his *Chriſt*, or perhaps is a member of a community more pure (that is, leſs corrupt) than others: who does not *hope* to go to heaven for his *own perſonal virtues*, but ſome how or other to *mix with the croud*, and to paſs along with the *ſect* and *favourite party* he has joined himſelf to: who renounces, it may be, the errors of the papiſt, or the wild follies of the enthuſiaſt; but takes no heed, in the mean time, to cultivate in his breaſt the moral graces of the chriſtian.

Or he is *that* man, who is conſtant and frequent in a circle of ceremonies, in a round of ſet prayers, and a rigid frequenter of ſacraments; and yet is no leſs guilty of intemperance, injuſtice, ſcandal, and cenſoriouſneſs, than the reſt of his neighbours.

Or, finally, he is the perſon, who deceives his own heart with a notion, that he is ſo irreverſibly *elected*, and *choſen*, and *predeſtinated*, to heaven and happineſs; that Chriſt is

bound to ſave him, though he has never taken the leaſt pains to ſave himſelf.

All theſe, and whoever elſe there may be of the like principles, are the *chriſtians*, who, with as little reaſon, and to as vain a purpoſe, call Chriſt their Saviour, as the Scribes and Phariſees of old were wont to urge, that "Abraham was their father".

II. Let me now obſerve to you the folly and falſehood of all ſuch expectations. Look firſt upon Almighty God, the univerſal parent and governor of mankind. He who created man in his own image, a moral intelligent Being; can take no pleaſure in, can be conceived to annex no divine rewards to, any religious ſervices, but ſuch as are ſpiritual and rational; ſuch as tend, in their own nature and by their own intrinſic goodneſs, to renew in us that reſemblance of himſelf, after which we were originally formed. He who "hath made all men of one blood to "dwell upon the face of the earth", can never look on one man, or one nation of men, with any eye of weak fondneſs or partial reſpect. All are alike his creatures and ſervants: all are equally related to *him*, the father

of

of all. He may indeed, for great and wiſe reaſons of his providence, confer on *ſome* larger talents, more extenſive advantages of wiſdom and knowledge, than on *others*: but he will finally deal by *all*, according to the *uſe* they make of the bleſſings he has beſtowed upon them. He will require no more of any man, than the improvement of what he has given him---will not fail to demand much, where much has been granted; and to puniſh moſt where moſt has been neglected. All this I apprehend to be undeniably true, and obvious to every reaſonable mind.

But let us ſearch and ſee in his *own word*, what the *fact* has been in all ages, and in all his diſpenſations with mankind, from the firſt creation to the day wherein we all now live.

Adam was the ſon of no man, but is called the ſon of *God*---the *immediate* work of the ſupreme and almighty hand. He was favoured with a promiſe of immortality: but that promiſe was *conditional*: for even this firſt man, born as he was of God, yet, upon his tranſgreſſion, forfeited his paradiſe, and his immortality.

Enoch, it is true, may be ſtiled the *immortal* man: for God exempted *him* from the common fate of death: but it was becauſe he had "walked with God", in piety and righteouſneſs.

Noah "found grace in the eyes of the "Lord", and had a *covenant of grace* made with him. But are you not expreſsly told the *reaſon*---that "he was a *juſt* man, and "perfect in his generation"?

Go down lower: *Abraham*, the boaſted father of theſe Scribes and Phariſees; upon what terms had *he his* covenant, and the promiſes made to himſelf and his poſterity? Read them, in the plain words of ſcripture; "walk before me, and be thou *perfect*: "and I will eſtabliſh my covenant between "me and thee, and thy ſeed after thee in "their generations". And how did that *ſeed*, that *nation of the Jews*, enjoy this covenant? Nothing can be more explicit than the *conditions!* If ye thoroughly amend your "ways, and your doings; if ye thoroughly "execute judgment between a man and his "neighbour; if ye oppreſs not the ſtranger, "the fatherleſs, and the widow, and ſhed

not

"not innocent blood in this place, neither "walk not after other gods to your hurt; "*then* I will cauſe you to dwell in this "place, in the land that I gave to your "fathers, for ever and ever". And what was the general and final treatment of that covenanted nation? Why, after their ſins had been viſited with repeated judgments, and they had *filled up the meaſure of them*, by rejecting and ſlaying the "Prince of "life"; they were finally diſcarded, captivated, enſlaved; and to this day, for more than ſixteen hundred years, have been diſperſed into all quarters of the globe; without temple, without government, without God for their protector, and without the Meſſiah for their Saviour. "The kingdom "of heaven is taken from them, and given to "*others*, to bring forth the fruits of it". And verily the words of the holy Baptiſt muſt needs be true---that "God, rather than "own ſo rebellious and corrupt a race of "men, for his *church*, and the *children ſpiri-* "*tual* of Abraham, would have taken the "very ſtones of the ſtreet, and out of *them* "have raiſed up children to that faithful "patriarch".

But let us leave this forſaken people, and turn our eyes to the *chriſtian* world. What is become of all thoſe famous churches, to whom the apoſtles preached, and wrote their letters; Galatia, Epheſus, Corinth, Philippi; of which St Paul ſays, that their faith and charity were celebrated in all the earth? Where are the churches of *Aſia*, to whom St. John gave his leſſons, and his warm advices? Behold! our own travellers, that have ſeen the poor remains of them, can tell you ---- 'they are left as cottages in a wilderneſs, 'habitations of a few indigent fiſhermen, or 'of wild beaſts': "in a land", as the prophet ſpeaks, "that no man paſſeth through, "and where no man dwelleth". And whence came all this deſolation upon them? The ſame St. John ſhews you the *cauſe*---- "they forſook their firſt love: they imagin- "ed they were rich, not knowing that they "were poor and blind and naked: they "would not *repent*, nor do their firſt works: "and therefore the candleſtick was removed "from them".

One great *weſtern* church, indeed, ſtill remains; but remains ſtript of all her primitive chriſtianity;

chriſtianity; and "knoweth not that", amidſt all her *worldly* grandeur, "*ſhe too* is poor and "blind and naked":----the church of *Rome* ſtill continues, after having been corrupted for above a thouſand years! But I hope you remember that "in the ſight of God, a thou-"ſand years are but as *yeſterday*". And they that know the holy ſcriptures, and the holy prophets, and the power of God, know for certain, that her time is *fixed*; or that, if the hour of her judgment has been *prolonged*, it is only that her deſtruction may be the more ſignal. When, as St. John aſſures you all, "the heavens, and the earth, and the holy "apoſtles, and the prophets, ſhall rejoice "over her, and her plagues ſhall be great; "for her ſins have reached to heaven, and "ſtrong is the Lord God Almighty, who "ſhall judge her".

III. It is high time now, that we bring all theſe reaſonings, theſe ſacred ſcriptures, and examples of God's providence, home to *ourſelves*. Many perhaps may imagine, and flatter themſelves with a perſuaſion, that "this nation, this proteſtant church of *our's*, "will never feel the divine diſpleaſure, that

" has been exerciſed upon thoſe who have " gone before us; becauſe upon *us* ſeems to " reſt the whole weight and intereſt of the " proteſtant cauſe: and, if *we* were ſwallow- " ed up, the kingdom of Chriſt could no " where be found". Alas for our ignorance! God has a thouſand ways, and ten thouſand inſtruments, to bring his decrees to paſs: and the fullneſs of Chriſt's kingdom will ſurely come, though *we*, for our iniquities, may all be deſtroyed! He who formed man out of the duſt of the earth, is able, out of the ſtones of that earth, to raiſe up children unto Abraham, and a kingdom unto Chriſt!

But let the judgments of God over us, as we are a chriſtian *nation*, be what they will; every man of us for *himſelf*, has a future and an eternal concern of *his own* to look after. And this is of all things moſt certain, and moſt intereſting;---that as many of us as have lived wickedly, and, inſtead of " bring- " ing forth fruits meet for repentance", ſhall be found to have borne their part in the vices and luxuries, in the vanities and impieties, of their country; can never be numbered with the children of Abraham, or of God,

or

or of Chriſt. But, in that great and ſolemn day of univerſal judgment, their ſentence will be the fulfilling of our Saviour's declaration againſt thoſe very perſons, to whom John the Baptiſt ſpoke the words of my text: "many ſhall come from the eaſt and "weſt, and ſhall ſit down with *Abraham*, "and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of "heaven. But *the children of the kingdom* "ſhall be caſt out into outer darkneſs; where "ſhall be weeping, and gnaſhing of teeth".

SERMON XII.

1 JOHN iii. 4.

For ſin is the tranſgreſſion of the law.

THE ſcriptures of the New Teſtament make uſe of a variety of arguments, all ſtrong and proper in their kind, to convert men from vice to the practice of virtue. They perſuade us by the love of God, and by the fear of him; by a ſenſe of his infinitely juſt authority; and by the dread of his almighty power and juſtice. They incite us to our duty by the mercies of *Chriſt*, by his life, and ſhining example; by his precious death to ſave us, by his ſpirit to guide us, and his commiſſion to judge, reward, and puniſh us.

But

But theſe *laſt* motives are apt to affect thoſe perſons only, who both *believe* the holy ſcriptures, and diligently and frequently *meditate upon* them. They chiefly prevail with men of *ſerious* minds, and bring them to timely reformation and repentance: while many *other* hearts are dull and froward and untractable; and muſt be attacked with arguments, that come more cloſely and immediately to the point. Nothing leſs than the *reaſon and nature of the thing itſelf*, direct *ſelf-love* and *ſelf-intereſt*, can convince *them*, and make them yield. And happy were it for them, if this would do! For a right notion of their own *intereſt*, will ſet all other arguments in their faireſt light, and give every *divine ſanction* its full force and power.

The words of St. John in the text (taken in *a general ſenſe*) are of this kind. They ſtrike "at the root of the tree", and ſhew you the folly and evil of vice, and conſequently the excellence and wiſdom of virtue, by the very idea of the thing; and by placing the definition of it before your eyes: wherein you may behold, at one view, its nature and all its properties and conſequences. "It is "the tranſgreſſion of the law".

My

My purpoſe, in what follows, is to conſider the word *law* in its moſt extenſive ſignification; and to obſerve to you,

I. What is the *law* of a *rational creature*: and what are the ſeveral parts of it, whereof ſin is the tranſgreſſion.

II. Thence to deduce the certain qualities and effects of vice; as they flow, *not* from any arbitrary appointment of Almighty God, but from the nature of things, and the nature of man himſelf.

III. To apply the whole, as a diſſuaſive from an immoral life.

I. When we uſe the term *law*, with reſpect to the inanimate parts of the creation; our common reaſon, at leaſt our true *philoſophy* and *experience*, tells us that it is only in a figurative, not in a ſtrict ſenſe. When, for inſtance, we ſpeak of thoſe general and ſtated rules, by which *material bodies* are moved and acted, for certain ends and purpoſes; by which the ſun riſes and ſets, and the heavenly bodies perform their revolutions; by which the trees grow upward, and the ſtone falls to the ground; by which, in ſhort, all the material world preſerves that exquiſite order

order and beauty, wherein we behold it; and when we call theſe the *laws* of their nature, or of their motion; we really mean no more, than that impulſe or impreſſion, which the great Creator continually and uniformly exerts upon them, for effecting the deſigns of his creation and providence. 'The bodies 'themſelves are incapable of moving, or *act-* '*ing*: they are entirely *acted upon*, and are 'altogether inſenſible what they *are*, and 'how they are *governed*'.

Again; there is likewiſe what we may call a *law*, whereby the animal or brute creatures are moved and directed. But this is nothing higher, than the mere influence of certain appetites and paſſions: of which appetites and paſſions they have no *moral* command, no diſcretion or reflection to over-rule and reſtrain them. And hence they are not accountable for their actions; becauſe they have no view of any circumſtances or conſequences of thoſe actions.

Law therefore, properly ſpeaking, can have reſpect only to *reaſonable minds*; to Beings formed with *underſtanding*, and with liberty to will and chooſe, and to act or not

to

to act according to the dictates of that underſtanding. And *their law* is the obligation they are under, to prefer and practiſe ſome actions, and to refuſe and reject the contrary.

Their *ſenſe* of this obligation proceeds from their very frame and conſtitution; from their natural power of diſtinguiſhing things and perſons, of comparing them together, finding the difference and relations between them; of reflecting, in ſhort, upon themſelves and the objects they are ſurrounded with: from whence ariſes the conviction they have (and cannot but have, if they will exerciſe their faculties) of the fitneſs and moral neceſſity of doing ſome things, and avoiding others.

As ſuch a being cannot but diſcover an uniform tendency in ſome conduct to give eaſe and pleaſure, and in the oppoſite to cauſe pain and uneaſineſs, to himſelf and thoſe about him; he cannot help concluding the one to be agreeable to his nature, and the ſtate he is placed in; and the other to be abſolutely inconſiſtent with both.

Let us now apply this to *man*, as a creature *compounded* (if you will allow the expreſſion)

of

of reaſon and bodily affections. Let us inquire whether *he* has not a plain *law*, obliging him to certain points of behaviour, with regard to himſelf, his fellow-creatures, and his Creator.

As to *himſelf*, every man knows the two main parts, of which he conſiſts. He knows his *mind* to be furniſhed with underſtanding, and reflection. He finds truth, the natures and relations of things, ſet before him, as the objects of his ſtudy and contemplation. He finds happineſs and miſery, honour and infamy, to depend upon the *uſe* he makes of his reaſon, and the free determination of his actions. On the other ſide, he feels impreſſions from bodily appetites, ſubſervient to all the beſt operations of his mind and the beſt ends of his life, when indulged to a certain juſt meaſure: but, when kept under no reſtraint, they darken the underſtanding, deprave the will, put the whole ſoul into confuſion, and weaken and kill the body itſelf. I appeal now to your own impartial ſentiments, whether for ſuch a creature *not* to be careful to maintain the due temper and decorum of its mind; to preſerve its rational powers free and unimpaired, for the diſcern-

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ment and purſuit of its proper good; but to ſuffer them to be ſuppreſſed by the violence of paſſion, and reſigned to the wild direction of lewd and vicious fancies; be not as palpable a contradiction to nature and providence, as it would be for a city to be ruled by a madman, or a nation by a ſenſeleſs and lawleſs tyrant. To govern ourſelves therefore by the dictates of reaſon, and a due ſubjection of the lower inclinations to them, is a *law* as clear, an obligation as evident, as reaſon itſelf, as nature and experience itſelf, can manifeſt any thing to be.

2. The *law* a man finds himſelf under, with regard to *other men*, is equally obvious. *Here* he conſiders himſelf as a *member* of a *body*; as a part, helping to ſupport the life and health and welfare of the whole conſtitution. *Society* is the field, wherein his talents are to be exerciſed. There is no living alone, and by ourſelves. Our natural wants and deſires; our buſineſs, and our very pleaſures; call for mutual aſſiſtance, benevolence, and fidelity. All are ſo framed, and ſo placed; as to contribute, more or leſs, to the benefit or injury, to the good order or

confuſion, of the community they belong to. For any one therefore to harbour an imagination, that there is no tie upon him to reverence his ſuperiors, or to practiſe truth, juſtice, and kindneſs to his neighbour; and that treachery, oppreſſion, cruelty, and rebellion, are matters *harmleſs* and *indifferent*; --would be to make himſelf the ſame monſter of a man, as he who ſhould affirm that fevers and ulcers and convulſions are *innocent* to the *natural body*, or that the world would loſe none of its beauty or its uſe, though the ſtars were to ruſh one againſt the other, the ſun to forſake the earth, and the ſeas to overwhelm the dry land.

3. Finally, with reſpect, to Almighty God; the very ſuppoſition of a *Creator*, the ſupreme and free cauſe of the exiſtence and happineſs of a dependent creature; of a creature endued with *underſtanding* to know itſelf, and the author of its being;--this very relation, I ſay, does as clearly ſhew an obligation upon ſuch a creature, to adore and worſhip its Maker; to ſearch into his will, and obey his commands, and purſue the apparent intentions of providence; as the frame of

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the eye and of the ear, compared with the natures of light and ſounds, ſhews you that the one was made for ſeeing, and the other for hearing. And the man, who dares to deny theſe *moral* truths, offers as great an inſult to his judgment, as *that* man does, who refuſes aſſenting to a mathematical propoſition, when it is fairly and demonſtrably laid before him.

Having thus briefly conſidered what is the *law of man*; I proceed,

II. To ſpeak of *ſin*, or *vice*, as it is the *tranſgreſſion* of that law; and to remark to you its genuine properties and conſequences; not as they flow from any arbitrary will and appointment of *God*, but from the nature of *man*, and the condition of his being.

If reaſon has aſſigned to every man a certain rule of action; if, from the very conſtitution of things, and the relation we bear to God and each other, our duties to *him* and *our neighbour* be ſo perſpicuous;---*ſin* (the thing that "fools make a mock at") muſt be the reverſe of all this plain truth: it is acting in direct oppoſition to all this evidence; to all the wiſdom of providence, and the meaſures of our own intereſt. And the

effects of it upon the mind, muſt be the ſame as thoſe of diſtempers upon the body: the conſequences of it in the *rational* world, muſt exactly anſwer to thoſe of irregular and diſordered *motion* in the *natural* one.

1. The firſt of theſe effects is *compunction*, and *uneaſy regret*: I mean, where there are any remains of conſideration, any returns of calm reflection upon ourſelves and our conduct. For I will leave no room for that poor objection, "that ſome men can live "without all remorſe, and have courage "to die hard". Prudence is the reſult of *thought*: and it is no more impoſſible for a man to ſin himſelf into a ſtupid diſregard of himſelf, than to ſtop his ears, or put out his own eyes. But ſtill, I hope, the light is pleaſant to behold; and to be deaf is ſurely *ſome* misfortune. And as you cannot avoid ſeeing an ugly as well as a beautiful object, if you will turn your eye upon it; and as you muſt hear diſcord as well as harmony, if you let your ear be open to it;----ſo neceſſarily will you have a ſenſe of guilt in your mind, whenever you obſerve the deformity of its actions and qualities.

You

You cannot even perceive any thing *without* you, that is miſhapen, and diſproportioned; but it always gives you diſguſt and averſion, mixed with pity. What then muſt you feel, when you ſee this to be the caſe of your *very ſelf*? When your own reaſon convicts you of having abuſed that reaſon: when you look for ſomething in yourſelf agreeable and pleaſing, and can find nothing but what is violent, diſtorted, and confuſed: when you look for the features and characters of a man, and ſee nothing left above the paſſions, and blind inſtincts of a brute! What creature can ſtand the ſhock of this reflection? Or what pain, what bluſhes can equal thoſe, which ariſe from the remembrance of the injury and diſgrace you have done to your own nature? In fine; vice is what every man is forced to *condemn himſelf for*, though he were ſure never to be arraigned at the bar of any *foreign* judge. For had he no *other* law, "he is a law to *himſelf*".

2. Therefore another property inſeparable from vice, in the view we are now taking of it, is "its abſolute inexcuſableneſs, on ac-"count of that *internal proviſion* which is

"made againſt it". For, as we may be drawn into it by many temptations; ſo on the other hand, we are fenced and ſecured againſt it, and enabled to recover ourſelves out of it, by the innate powers and ſuggeſtions of our own minds. Our reaſon directs us to truth and juſtice; our natural taſte and experience lead us to admire the beauty and excellence of ſobriety and virtue: and whenever we conſider ourſelves as having tranſgreſſed our due bounds; every paſſion we have, ſtrives and ſtruggles to call us back. Our ſhame and our fear point out the danger, and warn us of the juſt conſequences of ſuch a ſtate. In a word, it is as natural to *repent*, when you *do* think; as it is to *ſin*, when you do *not*.

What then can be pleaded in behalf of ſuch a creature, if it continues obſtinate in wickedneſs, and rejects the counſel of its own mind and conſcience! If it loves to walk in darkneſs, while a candle is ſet up in the middle of it! "The ſpirit of man is the "candle of the Lord".

3. It follows from all that has been ſaid, that "if virtue be the law of *human nature*, "and

"and vice the plain and guilty breach of it; "then the one muſt be alſo the law of *God*, "and the other a criminal violation of his "divine will". For how can any thing be a law of *nature*, without being a law of the great *author* of nature? Can goodneſs be the excellence, and wickedneſs the depravity, of a reaſonable creature; and yet neither of them bear any reſpect to the approbation or diſpleaſure of *Him*, who is the perfection of reaſon and wiſdom?

This conſequence gives you a ſtill more full and complete definition of vice. "As "it is an offence againſt the law of a man's "own mind, and the intereſt of his perſon; "ſo is it an *equal* offence againſt all the good- "neſs and mercy, a contempt of all the au- "thority and providence, of the ſupreme "Lawgiver. And were you to take revela- tion and *chriſtianity* into the reckoning, you would then *indeed* ſee the truth of St. Paul's words; and "ſin would appear *exceeding* "ſinful".

4. Wherefore, the laſt conſequence of a vicious life is, that "God will and muſt re- "venge and puniſh it; that He, who is the

" governor, as well as the Creator, of moral " and free agents, will not fail to demand " an account of the uſe they have made of " the talents and faculties He has beſtowed " upon them;---and that the ſame divine " wiſdom, which has given them wholeſome " rules, and bleſt them with the knowledge " of his *law*, will aſſuredly vindicate his own " honour, and the honour of his govern- " ment". And, in few words, all you get by ſuppoſing, that the juſtice of heaven does not appear to diſtribute rewards adequate to the brave and ſteady and injured virtue of ſome, nor marks of ſuitable vengeance upon the profligacy and impiety of others, in the *preſent* life---is only " a more certain and " evident demonſtration, that it will be done " in *another* ſtate",

III. You need not be told that my deſign has been, to enter into the very nature, and to lay open the neceſſary and fundamental evil, of all ſinful practices, as they are a deviation from the eſſential *law*, by which a reaſonable creature ought to conduct itſelf. And I have done this chiefly for the ſake of thoſe perſons, whom no *chriſtian* arguments

can

can move; with whom *ſcripture* may have but little weight, becauſe it is little ſtudied or conſidered by them. Now if ſuch men will only reflect upon the dignity of their nature; upon their character and reputation; their inward peace, and proper enjoyment;—they muſt ſee a life of temperance, honeſty and righteouſneſs, to be the only preſervatives of theſe invaluable bleſſings, and iniquity and debauchery to be the utter ruin and deſtruction of them all; and that true *humanity* would debar them from wickedneſs, though *Chriſt* had never delivered a ſingle precept about it.

But if the powers of luſt and ſenſuality be ſo prevalent, that this *original argument* can lay no hold on them; if they will neither caſt an eye of care and pity upon themſelves, nor look up to God their Maker, "who "hath taught them more than the beaſts of "the field, and made them wiſer than the "fowls of heaven";——*chriſtianity* will be urged in vain, where *reaſon* has loſt her ground: and the doctrine and life, the death and example, of the *ſon of God*, will have little influence upon *them*, who have no ſenſe of *God himſelf*.

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The whole muſt be left to the deciſion of that final day, wherein we ſhall *all* be made ſenſible what we have *here* been thinking and doing---when God, who created the world, ſhall judge it with equity, and render to every man according to his works.

To him be glory.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 12.

Every where and in all things I am inſtructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to ſuffer need.

I Have here read to you a ſentence, that carries in it ſuch a greatneſs of ſoul, ſuch an elevation of ſpirit; that whoever can truly ſpeak it of himſelf, is arrived at the ſummit of philoſophy; and is worthy the character, not only of a *wiſe man*, but of a *real chriſtian*.

It is the common maxim of *worldly prudence*, "to make choice (as far as poſſible) "of that ſituation of life, which will moſt "conduce to the paſſing our days in *eaſe* and "*independence*". But the preſent ſtate of things,

things, in abundance of caſes, will allow no room for the exerciſe of ſuch a choice. It has pleaſed the univerſal providence, to ſuit the varieties of *preſent fortunes* to the ſeveral virtues intended to be cultivated and promoted by them. So that men, even *chriſtians*, are obliged to take the world, not always as they could wiſh it, but as they find it. And *here* it is, that wiſdom and religion are to have place: this is the field wherein chriſtianity is to diſplay its peculiar power, its noble influence on the conduct of human life;---by teaching us, what is exemplified in the behaviour of the chief of the apoſtles, and expreſſed in the words of the text; viz. 'the heavenly art of being contented, and of 'acting well, under all circumſtances of life, 'whether in plenty or in poverty, in proſpe-'rity or adverſity'; the divine ſcience of "knowing both how to be full and to be "hungry, how to abound and to ſuffer need".

My purpoſe, in treating this ſubject, ſhall be compriſed in two articles:

I. To deſcribe the virtue of contentment, and to ſhew you who is properly the contented man;

II. To

II. To try, by ſome ſuitable and affecting arguments, to engage your endeavours to attain ſo excellent a quality.

I. This duty, like many others, is liable to be miſtaken by many perſons, in whom there appears either a weak head, or (which as often happens) a wrong heart. Moſt people profeſs to be contented, but few are really ſo.

Give me leave then, to ſtate it rightly; by clearing away the errors, and ſettling the juſt notion of it.

True contentment is not a ſtupid and hardy unconcern at the events of things; nor a ſenſeleſs indifference about whatever may befall us in life. It is not grounded in any principle of *fate* or *predeſtination*, or a belief that good and evil, riches and poverty, pleaſure and pain, are irrevocably *doomed* and fixed upon any man, by an arbitrary *will* and appointment: ſo as that it ſhould be the part of a wiſe man to reſt contented with his lot, merely becauſe he cannot *alter* it; and ſcorn to complain, only becauſe he cannot help himſelf. No! Philoſophy does not pretend to take away our *ſenſes*, or deprive us

of

of our feeling; but to ſupport us, the beſt of any thing, under what we *do* feel; and to inſtruct us to behave worthily and becomingly under what we enjoy;---to lighten our afflictions with the comforts of reaſon and wiſdom, and to regulate our pleaſures by the maxims of duty and diſcretion.

This amiable virtue therefore is founded in a pious and rational apprehenſion of *God*, the ſupreme governor of the world; of his juſtice and righteouſneſs in ordaining or permitting the various conditions, the promiſcuous turns of good and evil, in the preſent life of man; and in a ſerious conviction of the ſeveral *duties*, of the *conduct* required of us, under ſuch or ſuch circumſtances. To ſay it in a word---*He* alone is *religiouſly* contented in his ſtation, who duly conſiders the nature of that ſtation, and duly performs the part that belongs to it.

This will hold good, in whatever light you can view a perſon, in whatever ſituation you can place him. If you take the man of *wealth* and *fortune*---when, and how, may *he* be ſaid to be truly contented? Not merely becauſe you may *not* hear him utter any di-

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rect *complaints*; no not though perhaps you hear him declare "he is *ſatisfied* with his "condition"; for a ſhame it would be *indeed*, if he would declare otherwiſe! But yet if this creature be ſtill inwardly *craving*, and eagerly *ſtriving* for more, while he makes no good or wiſe improvement of what he has already; how can he poſſibly be ſtiled the *contented* man? A coward may as well claim the command of an army, or an idiot the government of a kingdom, as ſuch a one can pretend to St. Paul's great art of "know-"ing how to be full, and how to abound"! Whereas if you ſee this ſame man *generouſly employing* the plenty, he is bleſt with; if he remembers the *ends*, for which it was given him; that he is but a *ſteward* of theſe good things; and that a day is coming, wherein God, "from whom all good things deſ-"cend", will call upon him to "give an "acconnt of his ſtewardſhip";--if he thinks, as he ought, on that awful day of *reckoning*; what benefits he has conferred; what wants he has relieved; what hearts he has com-forted; what delight he has taken in being "a father of the fatherleſs", and "a helper

"of

"of the friendleſs";---*then* is he truly contented, and truly happy himſelf by his care to make others ſo.

Take, next, the caſe of the *poor* into the like examination: and when can a man of *this* rank be pronounced to be religiouſly contented, and to have learned with the apoſtle how "to be hungry, and to ſuffer "need"? Not ſurely, when he ſits him down in the ſtoical mood of ſulky reſolution to bear what he ſuppoſes to come by *neceſſity*, and to be impoſed upon him by a blind and irreverſible *decree*;---which, if it can be called *contentment*, is a fooliſh and even a wicked one: it has all the *ill-nature*, that an imaginary virtue can be conceived to have; and is deſtitute of all the comforts, that accrue from the exerciſe of true and genuine piety. Such a perſon may be ſaid to *endure* his condition, but not all to be *contented* with it.

But ſuppoſe this poor man to lift up his eye and his heart to his *Maker*, with an humble and chearful reliance upon that almighty power which ordereth all things for the beſt;----and ſee, on what a ſolid and never-

never-failing principle his contentment is laid! See how many circumſtances there are, to render it a *real* virtue! He *now* conſiders the wiſe *purpoſes of heaven*, in placing him in this ſituation: he reflects upon the *work* he is to perform, and the *duties* he is to diſcharge, in it: and thus he becomes *honeſt, induſtrious*, uſeful to his country, a faithful ſubject to his king, and a faithful ſervant to his God. Whenever he feels the want of what others enjoy; he preſently takes refuge in the pious words of the Pſalmiſt: "the "Lord is my ſhepherd; therefore I ſhall "(finally) lack nothing". If he be ſometimes expoſed to hunger and thirſt, he can eaſily bear them, when he calls to mind *that* heavenly ſhepherd, who will *one day* "feed him in the green paſtures, and lead him forth "to the waters of comfort".

II. Having made theſe ſhort remarks upon the nature of this excellent virtue; let us attend a while to the *arguments*, that ſhould induce us to the *practice* of it. And theſe I ſhall endeavour to adapt to the different perſons and circumſtances, that are moſt likely to require them.

To offer reaſons to perſuade a man to be contented with an ample eſtate, and a great flow of riches about him, may ſeem a very needleſs labour, and an impertinent undertaking. And ſo indeed it *would be*, if all that "ſpend their days in wealth and proſpe-"rity", were duly inſtructed how to abound" ---how to *beſtow* their abundance wiſely, and to be happy in ſuch a conduct. But alas! How often do we find it otherwiſe! Extravagant fancies, raging deſires, and unbounded ambition, are the ſo frequent attendants of high fortunes, that they turn plenty itſelf into a mere *cheat*, and a *ſnare*; and deſtroy the ſatisfaction it *pretends* to give, and really *ought* to give. Thoſe paſſions are inſatiable: the ocean itſelf can hardly fill a ſelfiſh imagination, or quench a luſt of riches; and the only bleſſing (I ſhould rather have ſaid the only curſe) that ſome men enjoy by poſſeſſing a great deal, is to "be everlaſtingly hungring and thirſting after more". Hence comes to paſs (what you all well know) "that there is many a reſtleſs heart, that "lives in a fine houſe; many a diſcontented "ſoul, dwelling in the lofty palace that is "ceiled

"ceiled with cedar, and painted with ver-
"milion"!

Now, what are the *arguments*, that perſons of this ſort ſtand in need of? Why, to conſider "what an error, and a folly it is, to "place happineſs in *things*, and not in the "*right uſe* of things": and then, what an inſult it is upon the divine bounty, thus to pervert the faireſt and choiceſt of its temporal gifts; by a *juſt application* of which they have the nobleſt opportunities of giving glory to the infinite benefactor, of diffuſing bleſſings among their fellow creatures, and of gaining to themſelves an univerſal eſteem, love, and veneration!

A ſtate of *poverty* has a thouſand conſiderations to raiſe compaſſion, in every tender mind, towards a man's repinings and diſcontent: and *hardſhips* will eaſily find a cloak of charity, for the murmurs and uneaſineſſes of the *diſtreſt*. But "to be *full* and *abound*", and yet not to be chearful, generous, open-hearted, and benevolent (which are the beſt and only ſigns of *real* content) *this* is a deformity and baſeneſs of ſoul, which the kindeſt hand, the ſofteſt heart, can find no mantle to

cover or conceal. This is that "ſore evil "under the ſun", which Solomon deſcribed ſo long ago: "riches, kept by the owners "thereof to their *hurt*"---riches, void of *contentment*, becauſe void of *doing good*---- plenty, the abuſe of which generally cauſes wiſe *men* to deſpiſe us, and the righteous *God* moſt aſſuredly to revenge and puniſh us.

Leaving, then, this tribe of men to their own deſerved diſcontent, let me turn your attention once more to the *poor* and the *afflicted*. By which *two words* I do not mean any of thoſe perſons, who through idleneſs, negligence, or debauchery, have *reduced themſelves* to beggary. No! *They* to their patience and contentment, muſt add *ſincere repentance*; without which their contentment will do them but little ſervice. In truth, a man poor by *extravagance*, muſt firſt grow *ſober and virtuous*, before ever he can grow contented under his poverty.

My arguments therefore are directed to *thoſe* only, whom *not* their own follies, but the *courſe of providence*, and *unkind events*, have ſubjected to that hard lot. And bleſſed be God, hard as it may be, true religion will

afford

afford you many comforts to ſoften and alleviate it. But the time will oblige me to collect them all under one general head.

Always bear in mind what chriſtianity, and all ſound philoſophy, teach you to be the *end* and *deſign* of human life. Remember that we were ſent into the preſent world, not *on purpoſe* either to be rich or poor, great or ſmall; not, *deſignedly*, either to undergo miſery, or to feaſt upon temporal pleaſures; but to be, all of us, by wiſe and various methods, trained up in the ſeveral graces and virtues, that are proper to qualify us for a *ſpiritual and ſuperior ſtate*. Every condition of life, therefore, has its ſcenes of trial and temptation, adapted to the exerciſe of theſe different virtues:----the rich are no more exempted from them, than the *pooreſt of you all!*

Look upon the world; and take it in the light in which experience ſhews it, and the holy ſcriptures have deſcribed it. It is a ſtate of *pilgrimage* and of *warfare*. We are all *travellers*: what wonder then, if you meet with ſome rough and foul ways! We are *ſoldiers*: and what ſoldier ſhould think

much to encounter ſome hazards, or to receive ſome wounds, for the ſake of his king and his country? But what country can be named with *that*, to which *you* are travelling, and for which you are fighting--- "the *heavenly* Canaan, the city that hath foundations, "whoſe builder and maker is *God*---where "all your warfare ſhall be accompliſhed-- "where the wicked ſhall ceaſe from trou- "bling, and the weary ſhall be at reſt".

Again; whenever you are enumerating your *wants*, be ſure *not* to forget the many *bleſſings* which, in all probability, you are at the ſame time poſſeſſed of. Put theſe into the oppoſite ſcale; and ſee if the balance will not turn to a tolerable degree of content and ſatisfaction. For inſtance; you may want this or that convenience, this or that *accommodation* of life: but then perhaps the defect is ſupplied, by the enjoyment of health of body, and peace of mind; of liberty, and repoſe--bleſſings that many an honeſt creature, many a valuable ſervant of God and Chriſt, would give the world for; and which are oftentimes not to be purchaſed with the beſt eſtate, or the brighteſt fortunes.

But

But farther; allowing you may labour under *outward* diſtreſs, under ſickneſs, or misfortunes; yet, if you have preſerved a fair *character*, and an upright *conſcience*, you have *that* in your own power, and in your own *breaſt*, which will cauſe you to rejoice in affliction; and what, if you are wiſe, you would not exchange for all the gold of Ophir.

To name no more; if you have loſt your *friends*; call to mind the *Saviour*, who has declared *himſelf your friend*, "if ye do whatſoever he commandeth you"; who "has laid down his life for you"; who "will never leave you, nor forſake you"; who is as powerful as he is good, "the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever.

Moreover ſtill; whenever your deſires of *being advanced in the world*, are urgent upon you; conſider the "danger that frequently attends a change in mens fortunes". Conſult your own temper; and recollect "how many beſide yourſelf are known to have graſped at the very thing that has proved their ruin; and have ſunk the lower, only by having been raiſed the higher."

Before ever any one fixes his heart upon this poſt, or that employment, or upon the

honour and affluence to which he ſees another man exalted; he ought to be well aſſured, that his ſpirit and his conduct would ſuit the alteration he ſo much wiſhes. "For "it is a very difficult matter to be certain, "whether your becoming a wealthier *man*, "might not make you become a worſe *chriſ-* "*tian*".

Once more; ſhould you ever be tempted by what *you term adverſity*, to utter any remonſtrances againſt your Maker, and his dealings with you; give yourſelf time to cool! Call to remembrance your own numerous failings, neglects, and tranſgreſſions: and ſee if, upon a fair calculation, though you may be leſs favoured than others, you have not yet abundantly more than you can pretend to *deſerve*. Look up to the God, whoſe diſpenſations you find fault with. Think how few of you would be able to ſtand before him, ſhould *he* be "extreme to "mark what you do amiſs"!

Finally; let no one, even the moſt *innocent* ſufferer, imagine his own caſe to be *ſingular*; but let him turn his eye to the numberleſs examples of thoſe *fellow-ſufferers*, who have gone before him upon earth, and

are

are *now* rewarded in heaven. What Prophet, what Apoſtle, what eminent Saint, but has been tried and purified in the furnace of affliction? Nay, what was the ſon of God himſelf, but "a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with griefs"; who "had not where to lay his head"; who "patiently endured this extreme poverty, that by it he might, at laſt, make *you* rich"?

To ſum up all; take with you the words of our *perſecuted* Apoſtle, and learn from *them* the duty I have been recommending to you. Eſtimate the difficulties you meet with, by *his* rule; and then, like Him, live in contentment, and die in peace. Reckon, with Him, that "your ſufferings of this preſent time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which ſhall be revealed in you; and that your light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory".

To God only wiſe,---

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

ST. PETER i. 17.

And if ye call on the father, who without reſpect of perſons judgeth according to every man's work; paſs the time of your ſojourning here in fear.

RIGHT and worthy apprehenſions of the Deity, are the foundation of all rational worſhip, and duty towards him. And it ought to be a ſtanding teſt of any religion, as to its preference above others, that its doctrines are more agreeable to the divine nature, and ſpeak more honourably of his attributes and government.

When we conſider Almighty God, as the ruler and judge of the moral world; the attribute that moſt obviouſly ſtrikes our thoughts,

thoughts, is his *diſtributive juſtice*; his perfect impartiality in his favour; his rewards of virtue, his puniſhments of vice; and his regard to the reſpective ſituations, characters, and conduct, of his intelligent ſubjects.

In diſpenſing the bleſſings of the *preſent* life, it is the wiſdom of providence to make a great *variety*; for the trial and improvement of different minds, and the promotion of the ſeveral graces and virtues; all which, like ſo many concurring roads, lead us to one and the ſame *point*, to the ſame noble end of felicity and perfection.

But *here* men have been apt to fall into ſome dangerous miſtakes, in their reaſonings and concluſions. By what God beſtows of bleſſings *external*, they would eſtimate his *internal* favour. From the different meaſures of temporal or ſpiritual advantages afforded in *one* world, they would with certainty infer the happineſs and privileges of *another* and a *future* one.

Thus the *partial Jew*, by miſinterpreting the promiſes made to *Abraham*, would exclude the *reſt of mankind* from all hope in the kingdom of heaven. And ſome *chriſtians* would *magnify the grace* of the goſpel, by confining

confining all the mercies of God, and all that Chriſt has done and ſuffered for the ſons of men, within the *pale of their own community*. And *other* chriſtians, ſtill *more* fond of a *reſpect of perſons*, delude themſelves with an imagination, that it will at laſt appear to be the diſpenſation of heaven, that, by an arbitrary pleaſure and appointment, but few even of thoſe who *diligently ſeek* to enter this gate of ſalvation, will be able to gain admittance.

Againſt all theſe errors the holy ſcriptures are exceedingly plain, and have made the ampleſt proviſion. The words in particular which I have *now* read to you, are moſt pertinent and explicit. And, that you may more fully underſtand the purpoſe and importance of them, I will,

I. Remark to you the principal inſtances of God's dealings with mankind, wherein he has proved himſelf to be a righteous and impartial governor. And as I go along, I ſhall endeavour to remove the ſeveral *difficulties*, or *objections*, that may appear to *ſome* to lie in the way of this great truth. And having thus eſtabliſhed the doctrine itſelf, I will,

II. Direct

II. Direct your thoughts to the *application* and *improvement*, which a chriſtian ought to make of it, for regulating his judgment and practice.

I. Then: all the diſpenſations of God, and the whole of his providence towards us, whether towards *particular perſons*, or *nations of men*, may be comprehended in theſe three articles.

1. In his diſtribution of the *goods* or *evils*, the enjoyments or calamities, of *this preſent* life.

2. In the ſeveral degrees of *light*, *knowledge*, and the *means of true religion*, which he has vouchſafed men.

3. In the manner in which he will confer the *rewards* and *puniſhments* of a *future ſtate*. In each of theſe reſpects I am to ſhew the all-wiſe God to be no *partial* ruler of his creatures; or, in ſcripture language, to be "no reſpecter of perſons".

1. In the *temporal* bleſſings of life, we obſerve great diverſity, and very remarkable diſtinctions--diſtinctions not ſo properly ſaid to be *made*, as *ſuffered* to be made, by the divine providence: it is generally *men themſelves*, that cauſe the wide diſproportions in the

the outward circumſtances of their lives. For if all men, or but the generality, would be induſtrious, honeſt, humane, temperate, and tolerably contented; though ſome might have a greater abundance than others, according to their ſuperior abilities and genius for *buſineſs*; yet very few would wiſh to have extravagantly too much, and hardly any would be found to *want*. But ſo it is! Men are not what they *ſhould* be: and God allows us to create theſe external differences in our fortunes and affairs. All are not equally rich, eaſy, and independent. The ſuperiority falls to many, without any due pretenſion of qualification or deſert: as, if money be ſcattered amongſt a greedy, gaping croud; ſome will get more than their ſhare, others go away empty. The caſe is the ſame with regard to power, pre-eminence, and preferments: the proud are often lifted up, while the humble and the wiſe are kept low. Yet is all this permitted, not without the perfect knowledge, and providential foreſight, of heaven. Since *hereby* room is given for the exerciſe of all the graces belonging to our human ſtate, and that tend in ſeveral ways

ways to adorn our nature. Hence are promoted the virtues of benignity, compaſſion, and liberality, in ſome; and of pious contentment, patience, and reſignation to the divine will, in others. Every man is ſhewn his duty, by the poſt that is aſſigned him; and is taught to look up to his Maker, by what he finds among his fellow creatures.

Preſent fortunes are not beſtowed as a *gift*, but as a *talent*; on the conſcientious improvement, or abuſe of which, depends the final happineſs or miſery of the rich and powerful. Nor is *poverty* a mark of God's *diſlike* of the *poor* man; but the means he has appointed him, whereby to riſe at laſt to the level with the *beſt* of his wealthy neighbours, and infinitely to ſurpaſs the *worſt* of them in all real and durable felicity.

So then, though there be a *difference of condition*, there is no *partiality*: though there be a *tranſient inequality of rank and figure*, there is no *reſpect of perſons*. On the contrary, as I hinted juſt now, the nobleſt and moſt amiable of the *moral diſpoſitions* take their riſe, and derive their very being, from this wiſe diſtribution. Pity, beneficence, with every inſtance

inſtance of private and public charity, are founded entirely in the indigence of ſome, and the affluence of others; and could have no place, if all men were alike fortunate and proſperous---the whole would be nothing but *dull ſelf-enjoyment*---there could be no exertion of the *generous principle!*

2. God Almighty appears, beyond exception, to be a good and impartial governor of mankind, with reſpect to the ſeveral degrees of *light*, *knowledge*, and the *means of true religion*, which he has beſtowed on ſeveral people, in ſundry times and manners.

In the vaſt unbounded extent of the works of God, variety in the qualities and circumſtances, in the faculties and abilities of creatures, is what conſummates the harmony of the creation, and gives it full beauty and glory. Whatever any rational creature is, or has, or can enjoy, is the effect of the free bounty, and mere good pleaſure, of the ſupreme Maker and benefactor. All have cauſe, and infinite obligation, to be thankful: and for any one to complain, by invidiouſly comparing his own powers with thoſe of others ſuperior to him, would be the

moſt criminal ingratitude. The faculty of *reaſon alone* (even the loweſt portion of it) is an excellence far above whatever is found in the *ſun*, or moon, or in "all the ſtarry hoſt of "heaven". Of this divine gift, indeed, there ſeems to be a very great *variety* in different men; yet God is *partial* to none; and every one is bleſt with what he had not the leaſt *claim* to; and for which he can never ſufficiently praiſe and glorify the kind author of his Being. Now the ſame argument holds good in the caſe of religious and *revealed* knowledge, as in the *natural* gift of reaſon and underſtanding. God may ſurely diſpenſe the *one* as well as the *other*, in *times* and *meaſures* of which *He* is the ſole and proper judge. Whenever men have clouded and depraved their *reaſon* (the inward rule of their moral conduct) there can be no obligation upon God, to confer on ſuch creatures any *new* or *additional* light. Wherever, or upon whomſoever, he may think fit to beſtow it, it is an abſolute free grace; to which as no one can plead any *right*, ſo no one can have matter of *complaint* for the *want* of ſuch a favour. Yet has the great God ſhewn himſelf

ſelf to be abundant, in this undeſerved mercy to the ſons of men. No ſooner had man "corrupted his ways before God", and darkened the road to his true happineſs, but a *Saviour* was promiſed---to re-inſtruct, convert, and redeem him. The patriarchs, and their deſcendants the Jews, had the firſt diſcoveries of this gracious deſign; and were made the *keepers of divine oracles*, for preſerving the knowledge and worſhip of the true God, till the fulneſs of time ſhould come for the happy manifeſtation of the goſpel to the world at large, as the ſeveral nations were found qualified to embrace and entertain it. Here now, was no *partiality* to the *Jewiſh people*. They were but the *ſtorehouſe* of good things, for their fellow-creatures. They were neither ſpiritual nor temporal favourites, above *other* nations. God ſubjected them, in the main, to the the ſame righteous law of providence, with which he viſited the reſt: he gave his bleſſing to their ſobriety and virtue, and deſtroyed them at laſt for their incorrigible vices and infidelity.

When the light of chriſtianity appeared, it was diffuſed with no ſparing or partial

hand. In a ſmall number of years, the principal quarters of the then known world received its ineſtimable benefits and privileges. We are apt, with ſome concern, and perhaps by way of *objection*, to inquire 'why, and 'from what cauſes, this bleſſed light is ſo 'wretchedly ſmothered and loſt in many 'large and famous countries'. If we would judge of all, by what we know to have been the caſe of a great many; God would eaſily be acquitted, and *men themſelves* would alone be anſwerable for the great defect. Let us try for a ſpecimen. That extenſive dominion of the *Turkiſh empire* was once the ſcene of all the glories of Chriſt's religion. The ſeven Churches of Aſia are mentioned but as particular, nay ſmaller inſtances of the ſucceſs of the goſpel in thoſe wide regions. Would you be informed, what it was that ſunk them into this degenerate ſtate of ignorance and impoſture? Read the three firſt chapters of St. John's revelation: take a ſhort train of hiſtory after them: and you will ſee it was, it could be, nothing elſe than the impious hereſies, the unchriſtian quarrels and diviſions, the cruelties and debaucheries, of thoſe eaſtern chriſtians, that deprived them of their faith,

faith, quenched their light, and "removed "even the candleſtick from them".

Carry your inquiry farther down, into our *Weſtern* and *European* quarters of the globe; and aſk, 'whence theſe miſts of error, ſuperſtition and the blackeſt idolatry; that have for ſo many ages deformed and ſpoiled the face of the *chriſtian church*'? See the prophecies, the beginnings, and the progreſs, of this ſad change, in that noble and valuable book abovementioned: the very particulars, how, and where, and by whom, it ſhould be brought to paſs! It is no more than what was preciſely fore-known, foretold, and juſtly permitted---what could not be *prevented* without a perpetual miracle; without unnatural and violent reſtraint upon the minds and free-will of chriſtian people. God has done every thing on *his* part, for preſerving all theſe nations in his true faith and worſhip. They who, by corrupting or departing from that faith, have cauſed the loſs of it, muſt bear the guilt, as well as the penalty. And I may ſafely venture to affirm, that the merciful and expreſs warnings given of this grand apoſtacy; the lines and characters of it, ſo clearly drawn by the inſpired

writers of the New Teſtament, ſo many hundred years before its birth; with the exact accompliſhment of theſe predictions, in the ages already paſt;---are as full a demonſtration of the truth and certainty of the chriſtian revelation, as any *one* truth can poſſibly be of any *other* truth whatever.

3. Thus has the ſupreme governor of the world been good to all, and partial to none, in the proportions both of natural light and revealed knowledge, which he has vouchafed them. All have had much more, than they could pretend to merit: many have forfeited what they might ſtill have poſſeſſed and enjoyed.

But God will finally complete this his adorable moral character, in the *laſt* diſtribution of juſtice and mercy to the world at large, and to every ſingle member of it.

This future judgment is the capital and eſſential point, wherein the ſcriptures declare the univerſal judge to be free from all partiality, or reſpect of perſons. When the ſeveral better or worſe ſituations men were placed in; the many or few talents, whether of nature or of grace, committed to them; the higher or lower abilities; the advantages, or infirmities;

firmities; the temptations or neceſſities they have been put under, in this preſent life---- ſhall *all* be "weighed in the even balance"; and the behaviour and improvements of every man in theſe various connections and relations, be weighed along with them; and a reward or puniſhment be proportioned to each without exception, and with every allowance that mercy mixed with neceſſary juſtice can make. When integrity of heart, and ſincerity of endeavours, ſhall be the ſole rule of the divine love, both towards the higheſt and the loweſt. When mere outward privileges ſhall be of no avail; nor the unavoidable want of inſtruction or underſtanding, turn to the leaſt article of condemnation upon Jew or Gentile, upon Mahometan or ignorant Chriſtian. But, as St. Peter here ſays, "every man's *work*", his *power* to work, and even his *goodwill* to work, in the ſtation of life allotted him by providence, or his *wilful neglect* to do that work, ſhall be the only conſiderations, that ſhall determine the juſt ſentence to be paſſed upon him. When, to be brief, the riches of *this* world ſhall have no pre-eminence, nor its ſhort-lived honours any diſtinction; nation, birth,

and family, ſhall be of no ſignification: habitual virtue, wherever it appears, ſhall ſuffer no abatement of its full price, nor unrepented vice find the leaſt ſhelter. The man who, out of his affluence of fortune, has generouſly relieved and ſupported the ſaints, the poor, the perſecuted, and the true prophet, ſhall receive a prophet's reward: while the good ſoul, that has no more than a *cup of cold water* to give, nothing but *one poor mite* to caſt into the treaſury of God's kingdom in the *name* of God and Chriſt, ſhall in no wiſe loſe *his* reward.

Thus are we to underſtand that God will "govern and judge the world in righteouſ-"neſs", agreeably to the ſenſe of the text I have been thus far explaining, as well as of numberleſs other paſſages of holy ſcripture: with the recital of a few of the moſt expreſs and affecting of which, I will now conclude, --- "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and "by him actions are weighed"--- "He ac-"cepteth not the perſons of princes, nor "regardeth the rich more than the poor: for "they are all the work of *his* hands"-- "As "many as have *ſinned* without law, ſhall "alſo *periſh* without law; and as many as "have

"have *ſinned in* the law, ſhall be *judged by* "the law"---- "There is no difference be- "tween the *Jew* and the *Greek:* for the "ſame Lord over all, is rich unto all that "call upon him"--- "God is no reſpecter of "perſons: but in every nation he that fear- "eth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is "accepted with him". And that admirable author of the Book of Wiſdom, is worthy to cloſe up all--- "He that is Lord of all, "ſhall fear no man's perſon, neither ſhall he "ſtand in awe of any man's greatneſs: for "he hath made the ſmall and great, and "careth for all alike".

Behold! I have ſet before you a truth of the utmoſt plainneſs, certainty, and importance. The *practical uſes* to which we ſhould all apply it, in our ſeveral characters and callings, will afford ſufficient matter for another diſcourſe.

To the King eternal.----

SERMON

SERMON XV.

ST. PETER i. 17.

And if ye call on the father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work; pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

AS these words, with many similar passages of holy scripture, uniformly represent Almighty God (the author of our being, the supreme object of our worship) as an impartial governor, benefactor, and judge of all his rational creatures; I have, accordingly, set before you the principal instances and relations, wherein he plainly appears to answer this amiable character, in his dealings with mankind:---either, first in his distribution of the goods or evils, the blessings or afflictions,

afflictions, of the preſent life: or, ſecondly, in the ſeveral degrees of light, knowledge, and the means of true religion, which he has, in different times and manners, beſtowed upon ſeveral *men*, or *nations* of men: or, thirdly and *chiefly*, in his final diſpenſation of the rewards and puniſhments of the future ſtate.

In going through each of theſe diviſions, I endeavoured to obviate ſuch doubts, or inquiries, as many perſons may be apt to raiſe by way of *objection* againſt this great and fundamental doctrine.

Now the certainty of this important article of our faith, will fix itſelf upon every conſiderate mind, as from the whole tenor of the divine word, ſo alſo from our beſt and cleareſt notions of every attribute of the Deity, as an all-wiſe, a perfectly good, and omnipotent ruler of mankind. For though it be abſolutely conſiſtent with all theſe qualities in a creator and governor of moral ſubjects, to confer what *original* powers, what *natural* talents faculties and perfections, or what *additional* and *ſupernatural* favours, upon each of his own works, he pleaſes; and in what *meaſures* he thinks fit, amidſt an unlimited variety

variety of dependent Beings;--yet to do this from any *partiality*, or "reſpect of perſons", all equally void of claim and merit, all equally incapable either of *being* or *doing* any thing to *procure* ſuch diſtinction;---*this* would be to act without due knowledge, and to fall ſhort of the idea of true wiſdom. For wiſdom ever looks both upon *things* and *perſons*, as they *are*; with an aſpect open, free and indifferent; and cannot give a preference of approbation and love, where it finds no ground for it. *Every work of God, in its natural place and uſe, is equally approved by him.*

Then again; with reſpect to the *behaviour* of rational creatures; God can never be conceived *ſo* to regard the ſuperior virtues of *ſome* (founded on the *improvement of ſuperior talents originally beſtowed*) as to overlook and deſpiſe the humble endeavours of *others* to ſerve and honour the ſame heavenly Maſter with the ſame integrity of heart, and pious ardency of deſire. *Real goodneſs* is ever pleaſing to the fountain of goodneſs, in whatever *degree* it is found. The power of doing any thing right and good, is derived from *him*; the ſincere *will* to do it, in every *proportion* whatever, cannot but be aceptable to him.

Finally;

Finally; the *almighty power* of God ſets him at an infinite diſtance from every ſuſpicion of *partiality*. All are equally inferior to him; all are alike dependent upon him. As he therefore who poſſeſſeth all things, can *want* no favour; ſo he that is wiſe, will wiſely confer it; and he that is perfectly good, will beſtow it upon all who deſire it, and labour to deſerve it----according as their reſpective gifts and faculties, and the *boneſt uſe* of thoſe faculties, be they leſs or greater, may qualify and fit them for it.

Thus does our very notion of God, confirm what God has declared of himſelf; namely, that "though in his original *crea-* "*tion*, or his general *providence*, he does not "give to all men an *equal ſhare* of riches, "grace, underſtanding, knowledge, and ad- "vantages; yet he really gives great bounties "and mercies to *all*; which if *they* will *em-* "*ploy* as they ought, he will appear in his "future rewards, to be, beyond the merits, "beyond the hopes and imaginations of all", "rich unto all that call upon him".

II. I am *now* to lay before you the ſeveral inſtructive and practical leſſons that are the proper *application* of the doctrine I have

been

been eſtabliſhing:----which application is contained in the concluding words of the text: 'If ſuch be the God, and ſupreme 'Lord and Father of all, whom you worſhip 'and adore;---paſs the time of your ſojourning here upon earth *in fear*'---'in fear of 'entertaining any unworthy *thoughts* of your 'Maker, any low and mean opinion of his 'righteous diſpenſations'---'in fear of *doing* '*any thing* unbecoming thoſe, who are taught 'to think juſtly of the divine nature and 'perfections'.

1. Then; "Let the ſenſe of God's im-"partial dealings with his moral creatures, "prevent and cure in us all raſh and haſty "concluſions, about the ſpiritual and final "condition of any part of mankind". In this point, the *Jewiſh people* were notoriouſly uncharitable: they arrogated all divine favour to themſelves. *Chriſtians*, of all denominations, are apt to cheriſh very high conceits of their own ſpiritual privileges. If they would all take care to walk worthy of what they enjoy, and yet allow all their fellow creatures to be in the hands of the ſame beneficent and merciful Creator; all would be well! But to fancy that all the reſt of the

world

world are loſt, becauſe *you* are ſaved; that *other men* have *no* talents, *no* graces, to "work "out any ſalvation with", becauſe *you* are bleſt with many *talents*, and *large* graces;--- *this* is to imagine what God hath never ſpoken, what "the judge of all the earth" can never hold to be right.

"He that believeth and is baptized ſhall "be ſaved, and he that believeth *not* ſhall be "damned", ſay the holy ſcriptures. But theſe ſame ſcriptures, and all common ſenſe, underſtand *this* of ſuch unbelievers only, as had the goſpel *preached to them*, and *wilfully refuſed* it. And even of thoſe who *did* refuſe it, we are no exact judges, by what inveterate prejudices, by what powerful impreſſions of education, they might be almoſt invincibly hindred from embracing it.

Again; the poor *heathen*, who never heard of a *Saviour*, and lives in a total and unavoidable ignorance of all *revealed law*; even *he* is not "left without law". As a *man*, God has given him the law of *reaſon*, "God's "own light within him": and ſo far as he follows it, he is ſerving and obeying the *God of reaſon*, and ſhall be acquitted or condemned by the ſame.

Laſtly;

Laſtly; the *preſent*, and *all the later Jews* (whoſe infidelity is more unhappy than criminal) have a *revealed moral law*; by the regard or neglect of which they are to ſtand or fall, when the world ſhall be judged by that "God of mercies", who "accepteth every "man according to what he *hath*, and not "according to what he hath *not*".

Since God, then, is thus a *Father to all*, both within and without the limits of his covenanted church; let your thoughts and ſentiments be generous and tender towards all mankind: and never doubt but that in "*his* houſe there are many manſions"; abodes of ſome degree of happineſs or other, for every one who does not obſtinately ſhut his eyes againſt the light that has been granted him, and does not "ſin of malicious wick-"edneſs".

But above all, let a *chriſtian* be aſhamed to confeſs that "God is no reſpecter of per-"ſons", and yet maintain that 'the final 'happineſs of his goſpel, by a dark and ar-'bitrary decree, is deſtined for a *few ſelect* 'favourites only; though *all* have the ſame 'open promiſe of it, and the ſame gracious

'invitation to it'. Will you ſay of your Saviour (the worſt thing you can poſſibly ſay of him) that he died for all; has given the ſame laws; required the ſame conditions; held out the ſame glorious crown of reward; threatened the ſame terrible puniſhments to all chriſtians alike; while at the ſame time he has, from all eternity, doomed the far major part of theſe wretched ſouls to endleſs miſery, after thus ſolemnly deluding them, in his own ſacred word, with pretended hopes of heaven and happineſs?

2. "The univerſal juſtice of God ſhould "teach every man a rule, whereby to judge "of *himſelf*, and *his own* ſpiritual condition, "and to regulate his expectations and fears "concerning it".

Look upon yourſelf, and remember that there is nothing in your *perſon*, which the great God has either reſpect or diſlike to. It is your temper, your actions, your good or bad qualities, that are the ſole object of *his* regard. Do you find juſtice, humility, benevolence, temperance and charity, to bear the chief command over you? Why, by theſe fruits of God's ſpirit, you ought to be

aſſured

assured of his favour, and to have the comfort of a good hope.

On the contrary; does lust, censoriousness, or revenge, still keep its hold in you; along with, perhaps, a scrupulous observance of many exterior and formal duties? Let them, who know not the heart, judge as they *can!* "God is not to be mocked: He is greater "than your heart, and knoweth all things".

Or farther; have you laboured under the guilt of sins, even of great and hainous crimes; but are come to a serious conviction of their folly, and to a sedate repentance for them, and resolution against them, for your remaining life? *Then* let no despair find entrance into your troubled breast. Remember again, to your unspeakable consolation, that it is not your *person* which God hates, but your *vices*. Do but conquer *them*, and nothing shall deprive you of the reward of your victory. If you "return to what is lawful "and right", never fear but "but the soul "will be saved alive". You may read your success in what was said to probably a wickeder man than yourself. "If thou doest "well, shalt thou not be accepted"? Are the words of God to *Cain*, one of the first

and moſt criminal tranſgreſſors. Preſumption therefore in *any* man, and deſpair in a *repenting* man, are both of them an equal forgetfulneſs that "God is no reſpecter of "perſons".

3. "This impartiality of God's dealing "with us, ought to caution *us* againſt all "partial reſpects, in our behaviour to *each* "*other*". I do not mean, that we ſhould not pay the outward reverence due to different ranks and offices, nor the inward and ſtill greater reverence due to all ſuperior merit. What I condemn is, 'the fond and 'fooliſh eſtimate we make of men from '*merely ſuperficial and external circumſtances*; 'and the low idea too commonly conceiv-'ed of thoſe, who want no worth, but that 'of worldly fortune and advantages'. It is the way with people of narrow minds, and little reflection, to meaſure their regards to all about them, by what they *have*, not by what they *are*. If you be rich and exalted, you ſhall have vain flattery, falſe and fulſome panegyrics, heaped upon you. Are you mean and poor, though never ſo wiſe, or deſerving? You will in all likelihood, be unnoticed by *moſt*, and by *many* be trampled on and contemned.

Were we to take the great God for our ſtandard and example, *this* conduct would have no place amongſt us. *He* looks upon *us all* equally as his *own image*: he favours one above another, only as intrinſic virtue makes the difference. In the book of Job you read, that "God is mighty, and yet "deſpiſeth not any". And Solomon was *then* truly wiſe, when he ſaid, "he that de-"ſpiſeth his neighbour, is void of wiſdom".

St. *James* had this argument warmly at heart, when he taxes his ancient chriſtians with this very vice. "My brethren, have "not" (it ſhould be tranſlated *hold not*, do not *profeſs*) "the faith of our Lord Jeſus "Chriſt, the Lord of Glory, *with reſpect of* "*perſons*". And then, having given an inſtance how unequally they treated the inferior part of their fellow chriſtians; with what earneſtneſs does he turn upon them, and urge the reaſon I am now pointing to! "Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not "God choſen the *poor* of this world, *rich in* "*faith*, and heirs of the kingdom which He "hath promiſed to them that love him"?

So it was *then*; ſo it is *now*; and ſo it will be ſeen *at laſt*;—that there is many and

plain honeſt man, of the lower rank of life pains-taking, humble, and diffident; upon whom ſome of the wealthy and the gay, your people of faſhion, title and family, would hardly condeſcend to look down, but with an eye of haughty ſcorn. Yet when theſe tranſitory diſtinctions of greatneſs ſhall ceaſe, and they are each to take a new *place* in a new *ſtate*; how rightfully would the words of the Prophet be applied to thoſe ſons of vanity and proſperity! "Behold *now* ye deſ-"piſers, and wonder, and periſh"! What would you *now* give, to exchange conditions? How happy would you *now* think yourſelf, could you even ſit beneath the footſtool of the man, whom you once ſo diſdained?

4. I have but one leſſon more to recommend to you, from this important doctrine--it is a very plain, and comprehenſive one. "If our common judge looks thus upon us "all, with a compaſſionate and impartial "eye; let it guide and actuate our endea-"vours; let it adminiſter courage and con-"tentment, to men of all orders and abilities; "under all the difficulties, and in all the "employments, of life".

This

This theatre of the world is a great and a noble object to contemplate. It has ſcenes very many, and of extenſive concern. Abundance of parts are to be performed upon it; all uſeful and beautiful in their *kind*:-- "no "one part, *in itſelf*, is little or contemp- "tible". For as on the *literal* ſtage, he that perſonates a ſervant, or a ſailor, to perfection, as *juſtly* claims the applauſe of an *actor*, as the man who repreſents a general or an emperor; ſo will the ſupreme Judge pronounce of *us*. Be your part in life what it will; do but act it well; and you have your praiſe, and ſhall have your reward.

If providence has put into your hands, power, wealth, and pre-eminence; know your poſt *here upon earth*: conſider it "with "fear" to abuſe, or miſapply, the valuable gift. Let the words of the Book of wiſdom be your conſtant monitors. "Hear O ye "kings, and underſtand: learn, ye that be "judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, "ye that rule the people, and glory in the "multitude of nations. For power is given "you of the Lord, and ſovereignty from the "higheſt; who ſhall try your works, and "ſearch out your counſels. Being miniſters

" of his kingdom, if ye have not judged
" aright, nor kept the law, nor walked after
" the conſel of God; horribly and ſpeedily
" ſhall He come upon you: for a ſharp judg-
" ment ſhall be to them that are in high
" places. For mercy will ſoon pardon the
" mean man; but mighty men ſhall be migh-
" tily tormented".

Change the caſe now; and ſuppoſe it your lot to be tried with affliction, or want, or mean life. Never be perſuaded to think meanly of yourſelf; or that God, the righteous and all-diſcerning governor, ſhews little or no attention to you. It was no *partiality*, no *diſfavour*, that placed you thus. Mark well the *duties* of your place; and by a patient and faithful diſcharge of them, ſtrive to bring yourſelf to the ſure hopes of even them that ſit *now* ſo far above you.

Finally; let a man be ingenious, and learned; or ignorant, and of the lower accompliſhments:----the one has no cauſe to boaſt, nor the other to be diſheartened. The one has a greater taſk ſet him,---a larger account to render up to the Lord who delivered to him his " *ten talents*": the other ſhall have no more demanded of him, than the improve-

improvement of what was given him. Only let him not "hide his *one* talent in a napkin": let both do their beſt; and both ſhall be recompenſed according to their *work*, and according to the *matter* they had to work upon.

Thus the ſervant and the maſter, the bond and the free, ſhould all remember, that they have one and the ſame "maſter in heaven", with whom "there is no reſpect of perſons" --the maſter of this whole ſtage of the world, who hath aſſigned us all our reſpective characters, and has a watchful eye over us all; who will give the greateſt of his joys to the greateſt works; but even upon the leaſt *worker*, in upright and earneſt *endeavour*, his gracious ſentence will be the ſame: "well "done, thou good and faithful ſervant; enter "thou into the joy of thy Lord"; 'into the 'joy that is adapted to thee; the joy of which 'thou art capable, and for which thou art 'qualified'.

To the king eternal.----

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

JOHN v. 14.

Behold, thou art made whole: ſin no more, leſt a worſe thing come unto thee.

IN the ſecond and third verſes of this chapter, the ſacred hiſtorian tells us of a certain *pool* at Jeruſalem, remarkable for the cure of diſeaſes, and thence called *Bethesda*; that is, 'the houſe, or place, of *mercy*'.

This water at a particular ſeaſon (probably, the time of the paſſover, the greateſt and moſt ſolemn feſtival of the Jews) had a peculiar miraculous quality of reſtoring to health *one* ſick perſon (the *firſt* that ſtepped into it) be the diſtemper he laboured under of what kind it would.

Our

Our Lord took notice of a poor *lame* man, that had often and long waited for this deſireable remedy; but having nobody to put him *ſoon enough* into the water, had been always diſappointed: and looking kindly on him as a fit object of compaſſion, and one that might make a good uſe of the mercy ſhewn him, he aſked him if he would not be glad to be "looſed from his infirmity"? "Wilt thou "be made whole"? And upon the man's complaining of the want of ſome friendly hand to help him to his cure, our heavenly Maſter healed him with a word, and ordered him to "take up his bed and walk".

Soon after this, our Saviour meets his patient in the temple, whither we may conclude he went to pay his devout thanks for this unexpected bleſſing. And the better to promote his pious deſign, and teach him to perform that ſervice effectually; the words of the text are a leſſon of caution to him, directing him to the manner in which he ought to *improve* this divine favour, and the return that God would expect from him; viz. "not merely to acknowledge it in pub-"lic thankſgiving, or to celebrate it with the "praiſes of his *mouth*, but to let it affect his

heart,

" *heart*, and be a perpetual guard over all his " future conduct" -- " behold, thou art made " whole: ſin no more".

You ſee already, how natural and evident is the *moral* of this ſtory; and how univerſally applicable to every man amongſt us: ſince we may all, no doubt, in ſome reſpect or other, like the cripple in the text, be deemed *ſinners*. And whenever, or by what means ſoever, we are delivered from the guilt and evil conſequences of our ſins, this is the lecture we ſhould read and remember;----that " the gracious intention of all divine bounty, " pardon, and compaſſion, is, to bring men " to a ſenſe of their failings and tranſgreſ- " ſions; and that our condition will be ſtill " more unhappy than before, if when God " has made us *whole*, we neglect to make *our-* " *ſelves better*". " Sin no more; leſt a *worſe* " *thing* come unto thee".

This application of the text I deſign to purſue, by ſhewing you,

I. How *we*, and all chriſtian people, are underſtood to be " *made whole*".

II. The danger, and fatal effects, of returning to our ſinful practices, after having received ſuch a cure.

I. Then

I. Then; what our ſeveral diſeaſes and ſickneſſes are to the body, the very ſame are vices and evil habits to the mind. As the fever diſtracts the brain, and fires the blood; ſo do inordinate luſts, and ungoverned paſſions, diſturb and confound the underſtanding, and ſhut out all ſerious conſideration of the nature of our actions, and the true ends of our being. As gouts and palſies deprive you of your limbs, and tie you down to your beds, and your couches; ſo lewdneſs and debauchery will cramp your beſt faculties, ſpoil your taſte of what is manly and rational; debaſe your deſires, and fix them upon low enjoyments, and mere animal gratifications.

When the holy ſcriptures therefore deſcribe the abject ſtate of a vicious, unregenerate man; how proper, as well as elegant, are the ſeveral figures under which they repreſent it! Sometimes they ſtile it *darkneſs* and *blindneſs*, *ſtumbling* and *falling*: ---- no creature is ſo *blind*, as the man who has loſt the *ſight of right and wrong*, of good and evil: none are fallen ſo low and ſo fatally, as they that are ſunk beneath all ſenſe of duty to God, their neighbour, and themſelves.

At

At other times, a courſe of profligate living is compared to *ſickneſs* and *wounds*, to *bruiſes* and *mortifications*. None are ſo *mortally wounned*, as they whoſe *conſciences are wounded with guilt*; none are ſo *dead*, as they that "*are dead in ſins and treſpaſſes*".

When Chriſt therefore is ſet forth to us, as the reſtorer of virtue and happineſs to mankind; one of the moſt affectionate and beautiful of all his characters, is that of a *phyſician* —the "phyſician of the *ſoul*". Thus have the Prophets painted this "ſun of righteouſ-"neſs", as riſing upon the world "with "*healing* in his wings". And our Saviour, in his very firſt Sermon, takes to himſelf the words, which Iſaiah had ſpoken of him long before: "the Lord hath annointed me to "preach the goſpel to the poor; he hath "ſent me to *heal the broken hearted*; to *reco-*"*ver ſight to the blind*; to ſet at liberty them "that are *bruiſed*". And the prophet Ezekiel, ſtill in the ſame pleaſing metaphor: "I will "ſeek that which was loſt, and will *bind up* "*that which was broken*, and will *ſtrengthen* "*that which was ſick*".

If you duly conſider the perſon and life of your Saviour, and the nature and deſign of his

holy religion; you will ſee with unſpeakable comfort, how fully he has anſwered this amiable deſcription; and, along with thoſe Jews who heard him apply theſe prophecies to himſelf and his goſpel, you will "all bear "him witneſs, and wonder at the gracious "words that proceeded out of his mouth".

For with what a tender and ſkilful hand has he completed our cure, if *we* will only ſubmit to his gentle remedies!

That the guilt of our paſt ſins may no longer oppreſs us, He himſelf has wrought our reconcilement with the offended Father; "He himſelf is the propitiation for our "ſins".

That we may not hereafter be drawn into error, ignorance, and ſuperſtition; he has opened to us the "whole counſel of God", has taught us the juſteſt notions of his divine providence and government, and the only acceptable way of worſhipping and ſerving him.

That we may never more be tempted to ſinful follies, or allured by vicious pleaſures, or corrupted by ſenſual deſires; He has delivered us the pureſt rules of life, and given them their higheſt influence by living them

all

all over in his own perſon, and leaving us his own bright example.

Finally; that nothing might be wanting, to diſſuade and deter, to animate and ſupport us; to work upon our hopes and our fears, and make our very paſſions become aſſiſtants to our reaſon;----this religion of Chriſt has armed us with all divine ſanctions, added to the moſt gracious laws; with the moſt intereſting promiſes, and the moſt awful threatnings; with the bleſſings of this life, and of that which is to come; with the aid of the holy ſpirit the heavenly comforter, and of Chriſt himſelf our continual and powerful interceſſor at the right hand of God.

And thus, in the *general*, may every chriſtian avail himſelf of the *ſpiritual* ſenſe of our text, and truly ſay "behold I am made "whole".

When the ſinful woman, in the eighth chapter of this ſame goſpel, was releaſed from her accuſers, becauſe not one of them had innocence enough to "*caſt the firſt ſtone at* "*her*"; the poor criminal perhaps might make herſelf eaſy, and imagine ſhe had met with an happy eſcape. But if ſhe thought at all rightly, ſhe could not but apprehend

herſelf to be ſtill in great danger. She had gotten clear, indeed, of judges that had themſelves guilty conſciences; but *now* ſhe ſtood before one, in whoſe heart was no guilt, in whoſe tongue there was no guile, in whoſe whole life there was not a ſingle blemiſh. *He* therefore had full right to "*caſt the* "*ſtone*", and to condemn her. But behold the mercy of this ſpotleſs judge! He treated *her*, as he did the impotent man in the text, and as he will treat us all. No *immediate* condemnation---only "go and ſin no more".

2. But, though we are bleſt with all theſe advantages of light and grace, of pardon and redemption; yet we are *men* ſtill! Men of ſtrong paſſions, and liable to various inſtances of miſconduct. And as often as ever we deſignedly and deliberately *ſin*, ſo often do we become *ſick*, and want a *cure*. Therefore the *ſecond application* of his text, may be made to thoſe perſons, "who by repentance "and timely conſideration, reſcue themſelves "from the dominion of any *ſpecial* and *pre-* "*vailing vices* of their lives."

From ſuch a creature as *man* in his preſent ſtate, with bodily appetites, and a circle of temptations about him, there cannot be expected

expected a whole life of perfect reaſon, and unſpotted virtue. The utmoſt that can be hoped for, is, that he be free from a *general* and *preſumptuous* tranſgreſſion of the plain dictates of his nature and his conſcience. *This* indeed is *poſſible*; it is his *obligation*, and the nobleſt aim of an honeſt and ingenuous mind. But ſince, even in *this*, abundance of us are ſeen to fail; the next beſt thing to not doing ill, and never indulging an evil inclination, is to lament it, and to correct it, in due ſeaſon, and with due pains.

Repentance, then, (whatever ſome lewd and profligate perſons may think of it) is a manly and a commendable principle; and beſpeaks the remains of ſomething in the heart, truly rational and good. It is all the amends that can be made to the party offended: it is the whole of what the offender can do, the whole of what the caſe itſelf will admit of. Without queſtion therefore, there is, from the very reaſon of things, an inherent worth and value in it. To break off evil and inveterate habits, to renounce a darling paſſion, and reform a vitiated mind, is a great, an arduous, a generous work: and as it is an

eſſential benefit to the man himſelf, you cannot doubt of its being acceptable to God.

They were ſuch reaſons as theſe, upon which many thoughtful and learned *Heathens* founded *their* hope, that 'God would pardon 'the ſins of penitent men'. But all they could do, was to *hope*: they neither had, nor could have, an abſolute *certainty*. For though it is moſt manifeſt, that repentance will *thus far* be pleaſing to God, and beneficial to the ſinner, that it will *lighten* his puniſhment, in compariſon with what it would have been had he *not* repented; yet that God will ſo entirely overlook any ſinful action (but eſpecially any ſinful *courſe* of action, as not to puniſh it *at all*---is what mere *reaſon* could never poſſibly determine.

And here I may modeſtly appeal to any *Deiſt* of judgment and candour, whether the foundation upon which the Chriſtian penitent ſtands, be not the moſt deſirable that can be; and whether he himſelf would not wiſh for a religion, which aſſures him of the forgiveneſs of his repented iniquities; which ſets God before him as a "father of mercies", pardoning tranſgreſſions and ſins: which encourages

courages his amendment of life by an expreſs promiſe that an atonement is made for him, and that the wounds he feared were mortal are kindly healed by the blood of his Redeemer;---that, in one word, he has nothing to do but to repent and be ſaved.

So then, whatever becomes of the *Infidel*, and *his* caſe; a *believer*, upon his *own principles*, may thus *farther* apply to himſelf the words of his Saviour; and not only as a *chriſtian in general*, but as a *penitent for ſins committed after his baptiſm*, may truly ſay "I "am made whole".

A *third* application of this text, and other like paſſages of ſcripture, may be made on our devout and worthy *communicating at the holy ſacrament*.

But here, I am afraid, a great number of us are apt to miſtake and pervert one of the beſt inſtitutions. To that divine rite belong great benefits and bleſſings; but no *ſecret operations*, no unintelligible *ſpiritual charms* upon the heart of the receiver. There is no abſolute connection between the *grace of heaven*, and the *mere formal and outward participation of the bread and wine*, abſtracted from the internal devotion of mind, and the real

amendment of life. No! the grace, and the bleſſing, all conſiſts in this;---that 'to ſin-'cere penitents, the devout attendance upon 'this ordinance of commemorating our 'Lord's death, is an excellent means to che-'riſh, confirm, and ſtrengthen all the virtu-'ous diſpoſitions and reſolutions, which they 'bring along with them'. But whoever he be, that either comes hither without theſe diſpoſitions at firſt, or drops and diſcards them as ſoon as he is gone;----every man of this ſort, is ſo far from being able to ſay "behold I am made *whole*", that he might much more truly ſay "behold I am made *worſe*".

And ſhould any one of *us* be ſo fooliſh and ſo wicked as to perſuade himſelf, that after a ſeries of groſs and unreformed ſins, a ſet of weekly devotions will render him fit to partake of this ſacrament; and that the partaking of it will wipe off all paſt guilt, and a return to the ſame vices will be only the beginning of a new and freſh account;---all that can be ſaid to ſuch a perſon is, "that, "inſtead of uſing this ſacred ceremony as a "means of grace, he is turning the *whole* "*grace of God* into laſciviouſneſs".

II. The

II. The ſecond part of my deſign in the choice of this text was, "to reflect upon the "peculiar danger of repeating our ſinful "practices, after the cure has once been "wrought upon us".

When our Lord gave this warning to his patient—"ſin no more, leſt a worſe thing "come unto thee"; he could not mean, that 'if ever the man again committed *any one act* 'of ſin, he ſhould immediately forfeit the 'whole benefit of his cure, and be puniſhed 'with greater ſeverity than ever'. This, I ſay, cannot be our Saviour's meaning: but by *ſinning* we are to underſtand (what the holy ſcriptures almoſt always intend by it) the falling into a *deliberate* and *frequent* tranſgreſſion of our duty. In *this* ſenſe, our ſinning after amendment and forgiveneſs, exactly anſwers to a relapſe into ſome dangerous diſtemper of *body*. For as, in ſuch a relapſe, the diſorder not only riſes again to its firſt height, but attacks a conſtitution already ſhocked by the former ſickneſs; ſo is it in the caſe of *vice*. Whenever you run into it deſignedly and wilfully, after fair conviction and actual repentance; as it *then* gathers more *guilt*, ſo does it gather more *ſtrength*. It

comes upon a heart that has weakened its own powers, betrayed its own reaſon, and defeated its own reſolutions.

A man who often violates his conſcience, and the good purpoſes of his own mind, is in imminent hazard of loſing all eſteem, all inward *honour* and *reverence*, of himſelf. He will have no ſpirit to form *new* reſolutions, when he has ſeen and felt how eaſily and quickly the *old* ones were broken. And thus, by loſing all *opinion* of himſelf, he will grow *careleſs* of himſelf: and as the taſte of virtue decays, the reliſh of evil pleaſures will increaſe.

Theſe reaſons make it but too evident, that though the chriſtian who has ſinned againſt the light of the goſpel, has indeed no ſufficient cauſe to *deſpair*; yet will his *recovery* be, of neceſſity, a more difficult work than his *firſt inſtruction and converſion*.

And that *penitent* chriſtian, who after languiſhing upon a bed of ſickneſs, reſolves well, implores the divine mercy, and obtains it; and then preſently forgets that mercy, and falls back into the very iniquities that were but juſt before forgiven him; may poſſibly be

again

again reſtored; but it will coſt him deeper contrition, more numerous tears, and a more painful repentance.

And finally; that frequenter of the *holy ſacrament*, who has demonſtrated by all his ſubſequent behaviour how ill prepared he was to receive it, muſt find a due preparation *to him* a taſk of extraordinary labour and ſorrow!

To finiſh all---what will charity herſelf be able to plead in our behalf, ſhould *that* at laſt be chargeable upon *chriſtians*, which our bleſſed Lord, the great phyſician, remarked of thoſe *Jewiſh Lepers* he once cured; "if out of ten of *us* that have been "cleanſed and made whole, there be not "found *above one* that returned to give glory "to God in a life of future and thankful "obedience; while of *nine* it may be truly "ſaid, that with ſuch ungrateful and incorri-"gible creatures, the latter end is far worſe "than the beginning".

To God only wiſe.---

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

1 CORINTHIANS ii. 9.

It is written, eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

THE arguments uſually offered to perſuade men to the practice of ſobriety and virtue, and to deter them from the follies and vices of life, are attended with the cleareſt and moſt convincing evidence, if we would only reflect upon the nature of things, and the circumſtances of our own being.

Theſe inducements are nothing leſs than the health of the body, the peace and tranquility of the mind, the proſperity and good order of all public communities, and the true intereſt of every private man.

Nay,

Nay, and even upon the ſuppoſition (abſurd and impoſſible as it is) that there is no God who governs the world, and that there will be no future puniſhment of any wicked actions; yet ſtill juſtice and right and truth would be what they *are*; and all falſehood, oppreſſion, violence, and ſenſuality, would be wrong and mad and extravagant. The *reaſon* is plain. For virtue and and vice, with the *general* ſalutary conſequences of the one, and the turpitude and miſchiefs of the other, are founded in the conſtitution of things, in the nature of human ſociety, and in the relations which reaſonable and ſocial creatures bear to *each other*, as well as to their Creator.

But though it be unqueſtionably true *in the main*, that goodneſs is to be choſen, and wickedneſs avoided, for their own ſakes, and their different and oppoſite *preſent* effects; yet in the ſtate we are *now* placed in, a ſtate of *trial* and *probation* in order to riſe higher in the ſcale of perfection *hereafter*, this motive is *often found* inſufficient to hold men ſteady to their duty, and to preſerve their integrity:---the argument is good in ſpeculation, but will not *fully* anſwer in practice.

Our

Our paſſions have ſo conſiderable a ſhare in our compoſition; our appetites are ſo keen and preſſing, and objects to gratify them ſo ready at hand; our pleaſures, our temptations, our bad examples, are ſo various, ſo attractive; that *mere reaſon*, in many *particular caſes*, is too feeble a guard to virtue. And though natural religion be never ſo true, and conſcience never ſo plain; there is ſomething ſtill wanting, to encourage and animate the whole man, to awaken and arm every faculty, and cauſe the paſſions themſelves to become the friends of reaſon;---in a word, to ſtir up the wills, and to ſupport the reſolutions, of mankind.

It was on this very foundation, that many ſenſible *Heathens*, who by the negligence and vices of their forefathers, had loſt all records of *revelation*, and had no *expreſs notices* of the doctrine of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; yet ſaw the doctrine itſelf to be ſo reaſonable and ſo beneficial, that they *invented* it, and pretended divine authority for the truth of it. They ſupplied with fable the the want of divine oracle.

On this ſame account it is, that Almighty God, the Creator and Saviour of all men, has

ſo

ſo acted his part towards us, that nothing might be wanting, no method be left untried, to invite us to virtue; no excuſe remain for any deliberate vice. Beſides the light and laws of nature, of reaſon and experience, he has fortified our minds with his own explicit ſanctions---to motives of *preſent* intereſt, he has ſuperadded the promiſe of *future* and *eternal* happineſs.

In repreſenting to us this future happineſs, the holy ſcriptures make uſe of all the variety of figures, and lively images, that are proper to affect the heart of ſuch a creature as *man*. They charm our rational part, at the ſame time that they kindle our moſt generous paſſions. For example; we love *riches*, and delight in the idea of *affluence* and *plenty*:---therefore you have propoſed to your purchaſe a *pearl of ineſtimable price*, infinitely worth the ſelling and parting with all you have, to gain it: a *treaſure* that will never waſte, that no fraud can diminiſh, no violence can deprive you of.

Again; we are moſt of us ardently deſirous of *honours*, *promotion*, and *ſuperiority*: therefore God, for your ſhort ſervice of obedience

here,

here, has promiſed you a *throne*, and a *kingdom*;----a throne which you can never loſe, a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken: and Chriſt will "make you *kings* and *prieſts* un-"to God and his Father".

Laſtly; we are naturally fond of fame, and are ſtrongly incited to action by the hope of applauſe, and the proſpect of having our names kept alive, and handed down to poſterity. How then could this ambition be ſo raiſed and enobled, as by an aſſurance that "the righteous ſhall ſhine forth in the king-"dom of the ſupreme Father, even *as the* "*ſun for brightneſs*, and *as the ſtars for ever* "*and ever*". And in the book of the Revelation our Lord has declared: "him that "overcometh" (the vices of the world) "I "will give him a *new name*: I will write "upon his forehead the *name of my God*, my "*Father's* name" (the greateſt of all characters) "in the city of my God".

Now grand and lofty as theſe deſcriptions may appear, they are ſtill but mere *figures* and alluſions: and to prevent our taking them in the *literal ſenſe*, and forming our notions of God's *heavenly* kingdom from any low and mean ideas of *worldly* pomp and felicity;

licity; and to exalt our views, and extend our wiſhes, to ſomething far above all earthly things;----St. Paul here, from the words of the prophet Iſaiah, has given us a character of the future ſtate, containing an excellent caution, as well as matter of inexpreſſible comfort, to all chriſtian people. He tells us that the joys and honours and pleaſures of it, are not only not the ſame in kind with thoſe external and ſenſible ones, with which we are *now* ſo apt to be dazzled and captivated; but are infinitely different from them, and infinitely ſuperior to them. Senſe has nothing that can reach their taſte, nor can imagination itſelf apprehend their greatneſs; "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither "can the heart of man conceive them.

But before we enter upon the particulars of this deſcription, it is fit that we attend a while to the *condition* and *qualification* of the *perſons* that are to enjoy theſe bleſſings. To which end, let us conſider "what the love "of God is"; "who they are, that rightly "exerciſe it"; and "how liable many of us "are to miſunderſtand the nature of it"---- "the things which God hath prepared for "them that *love* him".

I. If

I. If this inquiry were brought home to the generality of chriſtians, and they were aſked in plain terms "whether they love "God, or no"; it would be taken for a banter and an affront, rather than a ſerious queſtion. Men of all denominations, of all churches and profeſſions, would be highly offended to have it ſaid, or even ſuſpected, "that they do not love their Maker, and "their Redeemer". Yet ſo it is! when we come to examine into this love of theirs, and put it to the only fair trial; when we prove it, as we would a tree, by the *goodneſs of its fruits*;---what do we find it to be, and what does the value of it amount to! Sometimes a wild fancy, heated by the wildeſt notions, ſhall carry men to an enthuſiaſtic rapture of extolling and magnifying God (which *they* ſuppoſe to be loving him in the religious ſenſe) merely becauſe they conclude that *He* has a peculiar love to *them*, and has *elected* them to eternal happineſs in preference to all other men, by an arbitrary pleaſure and decree. And thus the moſt fooliſh, and even ſinful preſumption, paſſes for real and genuine piety.

Sometimes a buſy and injudicious zeal for certain ſpeculative doctrines; for the favourite tenets of a *party*; for a few inſignificant forms and ceremonies of worſhip;---a ſtrict attention to theſe matters, and a forwardneſs to diſpute and contend about them, ſhall be deemed pious fervour and the ſpirit of holineſs. And hence does that cheap and eaſy thing, called *formality*, uſurp the ſacred name of *religious love*.

Other men, with rather a more ſpecious appearance, and ſomewhat a better face of piety, make ſhift to work up their minds to a *contemplative* love of the Deity. When they conſider his infinite attributes, his almighty power, his univerſal preſence, his unerring wiſdom, and his diffuſive goodneſs and mercies over all his works; they have before them (and it is impoſſible but they *muſt* have) a moſt lovely idea, an object the moſt amiable that can be! So they *admire*, becauſe they cannot do otherwiſe! But if a ſtop is made *here*, you have nothing more than the love of *ſpeculation only*, an entertainment of *mere wonder*:--you are ſtill far ſhort of *religion* and *duty*. For *that* love of God, which our own beſt *reaſon* dictates, and which the

the *ſcriptures* recommend and preſs upon us as a qualification for the future rewards, is a *practical* thing, and includes the whole of a good and virtuous life. It is not ſeated in the *fancy*, nor lies dormant in the *underſtanding*, but influences the *will*, and regulates the *moral conduct*. It is not a fit of *paſſion*----a tranſient guſt and wind of affection--but a ſedate and permanent principle of heart, leading us to *imitate* thoſe divine excellencies which we love and revere.

If you truly love your *fellow creature*, you will always ſtudy to *oblige* him, to be *like* him, and thereby *agreeable* to him; for likeneſs naturally begets love: and if you have a generous deſire to *oblige* him, it is an infallible ſign you *love* him.

I might elucidate this, by the moſt familiar inſtances; and the ſcriptures that confirm it, are almoſt without end.

A *ſubject* is not underſtood to love his *king*, by commending his valour, his policy, or his perſon, or by admiring the gaiety and ſplendour of his court; nor a *child* to love a tender and affectionate *parent*, by rejoicing at the largeneſs of his eſtate, or being pleaſed with his kindneſſes and indulgence: but *that* man

loves his prince effectually, who *obſerves his laws*, and promotes the peace and welfare of his government: and *that* ſon honoureth his father aright, who *follows his good example*, and does every thing in his power to advance the honour and intereſt of his family.

And this, from the beginning to the end, is the *ſcripture* notion of the love we owe to "our Father who is in heaven". The foundation of that love, is a juſt ſenſe of the divine nature and perfections; and the conſtant and *only* marks of it, are our humble and ſincere endeavours to tranſcribe thoſe perfections into ourſelves, by an uniform courſe of ſobriety, righteouſneſs, and charity.

When Moſes, in the tenth chapter of Deuteronomy, exhorts the Iſraelites "to "*fear* the Lord and to *love* him" (which are one and the ſame thing) he preſently ſhews them what this duty is, and how they are to perform it: "to walk in his ways, and "to ſerve him with all their heart, and all "their ſoul; to keep his commandments "and his ſtatutes, which he commanded "them for their good."

Our bleſſed Saviour ſeems to have thought he could never too often repeat the inſepara-

ble

ble connection between *loving* God and *obeying* him. "If ye *love* me, keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, *he* it is that "*loveth* me". And St. John, who leaned on his boſom, and appears to have known his moſt intimate notions, dwells upon this topic throughout his firſt epiſtle: "whoſo "*keepeth his word*, in *him* verily is the *love of* "*God* perfected: hereby we know that we "are *of the truth*, and ſhall aſſure our hearts "before him. This is the *love* of God, that "we keep his commandments". In the fourth chapter, he has a moſt clear and ſtriking illuſtration of this matter: "no "man hath *ſeen* God at any time: if we *love* "*one another*, God dwelleth in us, and *his* "*love* is perfected in us. If a man ſay, I *love* "*God*, and *hateth his brother*, he is a liar: "for he that loveth not his *brother* whom he "*hath* ſeen, how can he love *God* whom he hath *not* ſeen"?

The *application* of all this is extremely plain:---- 'as a wicked man can never pre-'tend to any love of God without the groſſeſt 'hypocriſy, ſo every devout and virtuous 'chriſtian needs be under no fears or doubts,

'whether

'whether he loves his Creator *as he ought* '*to do*. *Obedience* is the *ſincereſt love*; and 'whoever of you leads a life of truth and 'goodneſs, certainly loves God, who is good-'neſs and truth itſelf.

II. And now, having ſeen the *condition* upon which the reward is to be obtained; let us, in the next place, take notice of the deſcription *here* given of the *reward itſelf*. "Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither "have entered into the heart of man, the "things" (the future happy ſtate of being) "which God hath prepared for them that "love him".

In this account the Apoſtle, in a truly elegant and philoſophical manner, heightens our idea of his ſubject by three diſtinct ſteps and degrees.

By the ſight of the *eye*, we are preſented with a wonderful variety of objects, both for uſe and entertainment. It opens us a view into the marvellous field of nature, and into numberleſs beauties of the works of God. The very light it makes uſe of, is a thing exquiſitely delightful and ſurpriſing. "Tru-"ly the light is ſweet", ſays the wiſe teacher,

and

"and a pleaſant thing it is to behold the "ſun". For, by beholding *him*, we behold, in the heavens and upon the earth, works of ſuch power and providence, of ſuch order and proportion, as might be ſufficient to employ and charm the minds of creatures far ſuperiour to *us*, for endleſs ages and generations.

But what we hear by the *ear*, ſtill exceeds all that we ſee with the *eye*. The place we *occupy*, and the tract of country we can *perſonally viſit*, is exceedingly ſmall; and the obſervations *we ourſelves* can make, are very few, compared with what have been made by men of greater learning and judgment, and of more extenſive knowledge. For *one* fact or one event we have *actually ſeen* in the narrow ſphere of our own lives, we *hear* of hundreds and thouſands, in all the various parts of the globe, and in the hiſtories of all the numerous ages that have paſſed before us.

So eminently does the information which comes by the *ear*, ſurpaſs that which we receive by the *eye*.

And yet even *this* is nothing, to what the *imagination* is able to deviſe, and picture

the mind. Imagination is a vaſt, and almoſt a boundleſs faculty: and to a man that improves it with ſpirit and vigour, it will form ſchemes of happineſs, draw out landſkips of pleaſure, and range into diſtant worlds and ſcenes of being, without name, and without end. Thus does the *fancy* comprehend more than all the *ſenſes* put together.

But, ſays St. Paul, unlimited as *this power* may ſeem, it is utterly unable to approach the nature and excellence of the heavenly ſtate. Our utmoſt invention is as inferior to *thoſe bleſſings*, as the ſeeing of the eye is to the hearing of the ear, or the hearing of ear to the imagination of the heart.

Nor is this any wonder at all. For the things of another life are properly *ſpiritual*, and muſt be *ſpiritually diſcerned*. They can be conceived by none but enlarged underſtandings, and cannot be enjoyed but by creatures of wills highly rectified, and of purified and refined affections.

In the mean time let it ſuffice us to know, that *there is ſuch a thing* as *ſeeing God*, and *being like him*;----that this likeneſs of him is the natural and only claim to a ſhare of his favour,

favour, and to a place in his heavenly kingdom;---and that this reſemblance of him muſt be *begun* in the preſent life, that it may be more perfect and more glorious in the next.

Let it ſuffice us to know, that as *light* is *here* the medium, by which we diſcern all viſible objects; ſo is *virtue* the ſole accompliſhment that can enable us to ſee and taſte the pleaſures of that celeſtial world.

Wherefore let no man deceive himſelf with miſtaken notions of *loving* and *ſerving* his Maker. Never be perſuaded that this *love* can conſiſt in any thing *really*, but 'in copying the ſupreme goodneſs, by a conſcientious practice of what is right and good, towards your fellow chriſtians, and towards all mankind'.

Eſpecially, and above all, be aſſured, that whatever be the *particular nature*, or *manner* of the future joys, a life of wickedneſs and debauchery will abſolutely diſqualify us for them all. Into that kingdom you can never enter with luſt, or pride, or envy, or treacherous diſpoſitions about you! Love none of theſe vices, which muſt cauſe God to hate you:

you: and remember that as with respect to all upright and honest christians, the words of the text are most certain, and most comfortable; so with respect to all sinful ones, it is *as* certain and equally terrible; that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither can it enter into the heart of man to "conceive", the *punishments* which God hath prepared for those, whom no arguments could engage either to love Him or to fear Him.

To whom be glory.---

A

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

MATTHEW xii. 36, 37.

But I ſay unto you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

For by thy words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy words thou ſhalt be condemned.

AS theſe words, rightly underſtood and well conſidered, are of ſignal ſervice to the due conduct of life; ſo the miſinterpretation of them has given ſome weak perſons much pain of mind, and a wrong turn of behaviour. That 'a mere *idle*, inſignificant, 'or jocoſe expreſſion can be ſo criminal in 'the ſight of God, as to draw a divine judg-'ment after it', is one of thoſe "hard ſay-"ings", of which every one may fairly cry out, "who can hear them"?

And

And in the time of our late civil war, and for a good while after, there was ſuch a ſpirit of ſuperſtition running through this nation, that many perſons (otherwiſe of as good underſtanding as their neighbours) by taking this text in the rigid ſenſe of our Engliſh word *idle*, kept their mouths almoſt conſtantly ſhut through fear, gave up all mirth and freedom in converſation, and ſeemed to dread to ſpeak even about neceſſary buſineſs with any tolerable *chearfulneſs*, leſt they ſhould ſpeak *evil*.

Now this and all the like miſtakes, proceed entirely from mens not "knowing the "ſcriptures", and the nature of true religion. For the ſtate of things about us, and the very condition of human ſociety is ſuch, as makes it impoſſible for all our words to carry *ſtrict morality* in them, or for all converſation to be *religious*. And if the affairs of life were not to be tempered with pleaſantry and good humour, to lighten its cares; the world would be a ſcene of *dumb ſhew*, and *piety* would be a poor melancholy thing!

The word *idle*, in our tranſlation, does by no means reach our Saviour's original meaning. The true rendering ſhould be, every

wicked,

wicked, malicious, profane word. What our Lord *here* condemns, is the ſame with St. *Paul's* "corrupt communication"---*that* "evil communication, which corrupts good "manners"---which proceeds from a debauched mind, and tends to debauch the minds of others. This the context inconteſtibly ſhews: for our bleſſed Maſter gave this warning to thoſe Jews who had *reviled his perſon*, and *blaſphemed his miracles*, and aſcribed them to the *power of the* "*prince of* "*devils*". He tells theſe men, he could expect no other language from people of *their principles*: "a good man", ſays he, "out of "the good treaſure of his heart, bringeth "forth good things; and an evil man, out "of the evil treaſure of *his* heart, bringeth "forth evil things. O generation of vipers, "how can *ye*, being evil, ſpeak good things? "for out of the abundance of the heart, the "mouth ſpeaketh"--- 'a man's *converſation*, 'as well as his *actions*, is the genuine effect 'of the *temper of his mind*: and therefore for the ſame reaſon that we are juſtified or condemned by our *works*, we ought to be ſo by our *words* and *diſcourſe*. "Every *wicked*

"word

"word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give "account thereof in the day of judgment".

What I intend to lay before you will relate, you ſee, to the benefits and miſchiefs of *language*----to the virtues and vices of the *tongue*. Theſe I ſhall,

I. Deſcribe in their principal branches: and then,

II. Shew you how equitable it is, that men ſhould be judged, rewarded or puniſhed, in proportion to either.

I. Next to thoſe noble faculties of reaſon and underſtanding, the moſt excellent and diſtinguiſhing, the fineſt and moſt uſeful accompliſhment, that God has beſtowed upon man, is that of *ſpeech*. By this, all the thoughts and inventions of the mind are conveyed and communicated, are enlarged and improved. It is this that facilitates all intercourſe and tranſactions between man and man, that gives all the pleaſures of converſation and ſociety; that heightens all our delights, and alleviates all our griefs. It is the nurſe of all arts and ſciences, recommending and endearing us to one another.

And as this power, when exerciſed as it ought, is thus highly valuable and ornamental;

tal; ſo the *abuſes* of it are the introduction of infinite and unnumbered evils: and a wicked tongue, as St. James truly ſays, is enough to "ſet a world on fire", as it is itſelf "ſet on fire of hell". I will reduce theſe *abuſes* to the general inſtances that follow---Profaneſs, Lewdneſs, Illnatured Wit, Falſity, Slander, and Flattery.

1. *Profaneneſs of diſcourſe* is one of the moſt daring inſults both upon God and upon *man*. Where a perſon has any notion or belief of a ſupreme Creator, the author of his Being, of all his faculties and enjoyments, and the judge of all his actions; the very *name* and *mention* of Him ought ever to be attended with the profoundeſt awe and humility of mind. We pay this reſpect, in ſome juſt meaſure, to the name of our *princes*, and earthly ſuperiors; to the "men of like "paſſions with ourſelves"; eſpecially when we are in their *preſence*: and how ſenſeleſs is it to forget, that the Almighty God is *always and every where preſent!* To throw out his name therefore, and his divine attributes from our mouths, in an unſanctified manner, or upon common and frivolous occaſions, is to demonſtrate a ſad want of regard to his

nature,

nature, and to all the relation He bears to us! What an evil tongue muſt *that* be, which can, for the meereſt trifles, call down vengeance and curſes upon his fellow creature from that very *God*, whom he himſelf profeſſes to acknowledge as the fountain of all his own free and undeſerved bleſſings!

Other kinds of profane ſpeeches againſt *ſacred things* or *perſons*, are alike rude and unmannerly towards *men*: and an obſervance of the moſt obvious rules of good ſenſe and good breeding, would be ſufficient to ſhame them out of all companies, and to baniſh them from every table and ſociety. What if you yourſelf may have no apprehenſions of Him that made you, of the written word, or the providence, or the judgments of Heaven; it is enough that *other* men *have*, and hold them in great reverence and veneration. To ſuch men their *own* name and reputation is not one half ſo dear, as is the name and honour of their *Creator!*

Surely there is an ingenuous treatment due to the *ſentiments* of your neighbour, as well as to his *perſon:* and it is impoſſible for wantonneſs and inſolence to ſhew itſelf more groſsly when flung upon a man's *face*, than when you fling it upon his *underſtanding*.

Every man's *principles* may be freely and candidly debated; but no man's *conſcience* ought to be offended. Matters of *religion* have at leaſt an *equal* claim to civility with all others: and therefore for any one to vex and fret the hearts of his companions with impious and irreligious converſation, is utterly unworthy the character of a *man*; and is as far beneath the behaviour of a *gentleman*, as it is of a *Chriſtian*. In a word; want of *belief* may be much more excuſable in ſome than in others; but *blaſphemy* can be vindicated by no ſophiſtry in any one whatever.

2. *Lewd and obſcene diſcourſe* is the diſgrace of the tongue, and a ſcandal to all who retain any taſte of the decencies of human life. No ſect of philoſophers, or writers of morals, ever ſpeak of it, but with marks of infamy and abhorrence. And the chriſtian religion, in higher and more expreſs terms, forbids not only all *acts* of impurity, but all *words* that are indelicate and immodeſt. "But fornication", ſays St. Paul, "and all uncleanneſs, let in not be once "named amongſt you, as becometh ſaints: "neither filthineſs, nor fooliſh talking, nor "jeſting,

"jeſting, which are not convenient"---not *convenient*----the ſame manner of expreſſion with the *idle words* in our text; words that do a great deal of *hurt*, and have very *ſinful conſequences*.

Our words have a direct and ready paſſage into the mind: they raiſe our ideas, and have a power, beyond all things, to move our paſſions. And whenever a vicious ſubject is ſpoken of in an indecent manner, and put into an unſeemly dreſs; it will be apt to *find*, or to *create* deſires in unwary minds, agreeable to itſelf. Nor will it be any excuſe (though it may *appear* leſs *offenſive*) if, being aſhamed of *coarſer liberties*, you convey your lewd notions in *more poliſhed phraſe*. This, I think, will be ſo far from ſecuring your innocency, that it will cauſe the lewdneſs to be the ſooner and the more eaſily received. But diſguiſe it how you will by the garb in which you cloath it, the minds of moſt people will know it too quickly, and probably entertain it with the leſs reluctance. 'Obſcenity is like the poiſon of the plague: 'you can never wrap it up ſo *cloſe*, but that 'the infection will be caught by all who 'come near it'.

Amongſt

Amongſt young people eſpecially, there is hardly a more miſchievous circumſtance in the world, than for *them* often to hear bad and unbecoming things embelliſhed with pleaſing names, and coloured over with ſly airs of ingenuity. *This* will abate their prejudices againſt them; kill their native modeſty; and, by terrible degrees, reconcile their tempers, and beguile their inclinations, from *hearing* to *complying with* what they would otherwiſe dread and deteſt.

It is of inconceivable moment therefore, how and what you talk before others, particularly thoſe of the younger ſort. And be aſſured that 'he will ſtand but a ſlender 'chance ever to ſpeak or to act like a *man*, 'who has been accuſtomed to licentious 'ſpeeches and manners when he was a child'.

3. Another well-known evil of tongue, is 'the abuſe of *wit*, by making unſeaſonable 'and uncharitable reflections upon *things* and '*perſons*'. *Wit* is a talent, that is generally allowed to ſet a man off in the eyes of his companions. But it is certain, that great numbers have it (or pretend to have it) who little underſtand how to uſe it. Many are apt to forget the *limits* they ſhould preſcribe

to this talent: they do not diſtinguiſh, what are the *ſubjects* proper for ridicule. Some *matters* are of ſuch weight and importance, as to be above it. Of this ſort are the clear dictates of religion and conſcience, and the laws of civil government. So again, *ſome men*, by their very rank and ſituation, ought to be exempt from all touches of a ſcurrilous tongue: and the natural imperfections, or the diſtreſſes of *others*, ſhould render them objects of compaſſion, but never of the leaſt rallery.

A keen and cutting reflection will very often wound another man to the heart, though the *author* perhaps might have no direct deſign to do him miſchief----like throwing about fire, without an intention to burn peoples houſes. And this *man of wit* is no better than *Soloman's fool and madman*, who "caſteth firebrands, arrows, and death; "and then ſaith, am I not in ſport"?

Let it alſo be remembred, that all malicious wit is, in its very nature, a great injury even to the *perſon that is guilty of it*. There are as high reſentments raiſed from words, as from actions. Cruel inſinuations frequently reſemble the two-edged ſword:---

when

when the blow is given too hard, the ſharper edge may recoil upon the ſtriker! And he that makes his neighbour afraid of his *ſatire*, has as much reaſon to be afraid of the other's *memory*. For many a one, that has eſteemed this talent his top qualification, has employed it ſo injudiciouſly, as to turn it to his own ruin and deſtruction.

4. *Falſity* of ſpeech is the immediate reverſe of all the purpoſes for which ſpeech was given us: and "lying lips" are ſuch a curſe upon mankind, that were they to become *univerſal*, it would have been a mercy of providence if we had all been born dumb, without any other way of converſing than what is common to "the beaſts that periſh".

It is this perverſion of language, that would render all buſineſs a burden and a vexation, and all trade a cheat; that would deſtroy all the validity of promiſes, make oaths themſelves to ſignify nothing; and bring ſuſpicion, confuſion, and danger into every ſcene of life.

Two ſpecial branches of *Falſity*, are *Slander* and *Flattery*.

5. Slander and calumny is the fruit of a tongue acted by a baſe and malevolent ſpi-

rit. It ſuppoſes the want of all ſolid worth in the offender. For thoſe men, who take the leaſt care to have any foundation whereon to build their own reputation, are ever moſt apt to build it upon the ruin of other peoples. They vainly imagine, that what they feloniouſly take out of the ſcale of their brethren's good name, will be juſt ſo much weight added to their own. A wicked man has a ſorry ambition of bringing down others to the level with himſelf: and becauſe he can find no comfort in looking at *home*, he ſeeks out pleaſure and relief *abroad*, by either inventing, or ſpreading about, the defects of his neighbours. But alas for his error! the difference between a man of real merit and a defamer, will always be as conſpicuous as that between a Diamond and a Glow-worm. The one truly ſhines, by the light of the Sun; the other owes all its little luſtre to the darkneſs around it.

6. And yet, if one might compare enormous crimes together, I could venture to pronounce, that *flattering* words are even worſe than *ſlanderous* ones. An open calumniator is indeed a bad enemy; but none is ſo bad, as a treacherous and deceitful friend.

And

And we have more need to beware of *that* mouth which utters friendſhip and praiſes upon us at random, than of *that* which liberally throws out gall and enmity. For, comparatively ſpeaking, the one fairly oppoſes you; but the other *betrays* you. An impudent falſe accuſer puts you upon your guard; while againſt the hidden traps and ſnares of a flatterer it is often hard to lay in any defence.

When this ſordid vice works its effect upon perſons in a private ſtation, it makes a conceited coxcomb of one who, without it, might have been a tolerably wiſe and uſeful man. When it prevails over men of eminence, figure and diſtinction, it will blot the greateſt characters, and ſully the faireſt fortunes. But if ever it creeps into *courts* and "*high places*", and begins to taint the *throne*; and from thence to extend itſelf, and become predominant in a nation;---it is *then* a ſure prognoſtick that 'ſuch a people are falling 'into contempt and decay'. It is *then* the forerunner of all public calamity; of the loſs of liberty, honour, and conſcience; of the loſs of all confidence between prince and

ſubjects, and all love of the ſubjects towards each other; upon which the common ſafety and proſperity depends.

I will cloſe this article with a remark made upon our own *engliſh* nation, and upon the fatal influence of the corruption above-mentioned, towards drawing on us the miſeries of the laſt civil war. Thus our hiſtorians have pictured thoſe times-- "Heretofore "the people of England were famed for "their gravity, truth, ſincerity, and all *that* "good nature which ſweetens and endears "the converſation that is the proper pleaſure "of human life. But *now* friendſhip and "kindneſs were made the general baits to all "the vile projects that were to be acted up-"on the ſtage. The race of men was ſpoil-"ed: and that freedom, candor, and ho-"neſty, which are the cement, the balſam "of ſociety, were baniſhed out of the land. "And thoſe flowers of virtue that ſeemed "natural to the ſoil of this iſland, were de-"generated into the weeds of *flattery*, trea-"chery, and falſhood".

Pray God deliver us, for the time to come, from the certain and dreadful evils of ſo depraved a ſtate!

Having

Having thus given you a ſummary account of the vices of the tongue, which our Lord *here* ſays will condemn us; I ſhould now proceed to deſcribe the contrary virtues of it, which will juſtify and ſave us; and then ſhew you the *reaſons*, why we ought to be judged and dealt with, according to either of them. But I perceive that, for the preſent, I have gone far enough: and the remainder will require to be the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

To the king eternal.----

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

MATTHEW xii. 36, 37.

But I ſay unto you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

For by thy words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy words thou ſhalt be condemned.

AS thoſe words, or that manner of ſpeaking and converſing, which our Saviour *here* ſays will *juſtify* a man;---that is, will be one of the grand articles of life, that will recommend him to the favour of God, entitle him to the character of a true chriſtian, and to the rewards promiſed in the goſpel;----as this, I ſay, is plainly to be underſtood of *good* and *engaging* and *virtuous* communication;--ſo I have already proved to you, both from the reaſon of the thing, and from the deſign

of

the text, that the "*idle words*" in this place, do not mean ſtrictly ſuch as our *Engliſh phraſe* commonly ſignifies, but *impious*, *malicious*, and *immodeſt* words.

Theſe I have enumerated to you, under their principal heads; and have ſhewn you wherein conſiſts *that evil* of each of them, which muſt end in our condemnation. The general inſtances mentioned, were, Profaneſs, Lewdneſs, Illnatured Wit, Falſity, Calumny, and Flattery.

What thoſe words and ſpeeches are, which, on the other ſide, contain ſuch merit in them, as to become an article of our *juſtification* at the great day of judgment, will eaſily be gathered, by only placing before your thoughts all the ſeveral contraries to the vices above deſcribed, and obſerving their beneficial and ſalutary effects.

After I have done this, in a ſhort compaſs; the Second Part of my propoſal, namely "how equitable it is that men ſhould be re-"warded or puniſhed for their *converſation* as "well as their *actions*", will the more clearly and ſtrongly appear.

2. When a ſenſible and conſiderate man thinks habitually upon his own nature, his Being,

Being, faculties, and enjoyments, as all of them derived from the bountiful hand of the infinite Author and Lord of all things; and has his heart poſſeſſed with a juſt idea of the duty and obligations incumbent upon him towards ſuch a Creator, benefactor and preſerver;---his *tongue* will, of neceſſity, be governed by his *ſentiments*, and his words will ſeldom or never diſagree with the apprehenſions of his religious mind.

Whenever you hear him ſpeak of *God*, it is with an emphaſis of reverence to the very *name*, correſponding to the ſupreme excellencies of the divine nature expreſſed by it. He will not invoke that ſacred name, nor ever mention it, upon trivial occaſions; nor in any caſe, but what is ſolemn and needful.

If he diſcourſes of *providence*, or of the divine *word* and *will*; he does it with a propriety and gravity of language becoming the dignity of the ſubject; and with all the ſtrength of reaſon, and gift of argument, wherewith that ſame providence has endued him.

When he diſputes about *any points of religion* (which he is never *forward to do*) he will throw out no expreſſion void of humanity.

nity, good nature, and the chriſtian charity. His ſpeech will be calculated to edify and inform every one, but to anger and prejudice none.

When he converſes *with mankind* upon ſecular, indifferent, and common affairs of life; his honeſt principles give ſuitable vent to his mouth, and the love of truth will direct his tongue. This is the man whom you may always truſt, and in whom you are always ſafe. His poſitive word and plain aſſertion, his yea and his nay, work upon his conſcience with the power of an oath: and he never needs raſhly to appeal to *God*, becauſe he is an *upright man*.

Having nothing *diſſolute*, no *unchaſte* or *licentious deſires*, in *himſelf*; he takes all poſſible care, that what he ſpeaks may raiſe no ſuch in *others*, his *fellow creatures*.

He looks upon himſelf, and all around him, with a candid and impartial eye; as *all* liable to errors and imperfections. Though his genius therefore be as bright, and his wit as finely pointed, as that of any other perſon; he ever aims it to pleaſe and entertain and improve his companions, but never to vex, or diſcompoſe the heart of any man. His

arrows

arrows never ſtrike with malignant poiſon: and he ſcorns to ſet forth his own abilities, to the offence or diſgrace of thoſe he converſes with.

So likewiſe; if you find him concerned in any debate about matters of *right*, or *injuries received*; you will hear nothing from him, that tends to "ſtir up ſtrife": but "with a "ſoft reply he will turn away wrath".

Again; the words of a truly good man give us no trouble to *interpret* them; no pain, from fear of finding them *falſe*. They are the genuine picture of his manners and his mind. They iſſue from a clear ſpring--from a real regard to his own honour, joined to the fear of God, and the love of his neighbour.

Once more; a virtuous diſpoſition yields a man ſo much inward contentment, and makes him ſo "ſatisfied from himſelf"; that his next delight muſt be, to ſee, or to hope, that all others are like him. His tongue therefore rejoiceth to commend and admire: but ſlander and defamation are arts it cannot want, and cannot but deſpiſe and abhor.

To finiſh the topic---This man will always uſe the "lip of *friendſhip*". His words

may

may *reprove* you, becauſe his heart deſires to *reform* you: they may *applaud* you, becauſe he wiſhes you to be ſtill *better*. But his *very* "*wounds are faithful*": and he loves you too well, to *flatter* and *deceive* you.

Theſe are the virtues of the tongue, the beauties and graces of ſpeech. And I make no queſtion but that the perſon in whom you may imagine them to be found, and by whom they are though but moderately practiſed, begins to ſhew himſelf to you in ſo fair a light, that the "*reaſons* why ſuch a conduct of the "tongue ſhould be one chief article of his "juſtification, as the contrary would be of "condemnation", will meet with an eaſy and ready aſſent. 'To ſet theſe reaſons before you,' was the Second Part of my firſt propoſal.

II. Some perſons may be apt to think it hard, that *mere words* ſhould ſubject us to the ſeverity of the Divine judgments! "Words" (ſay they) "are light and airy matters, that "paſs away like the wind, without any hurt-"ful influence; and frequently proceed from "no previous malice, or miſchievous deſign: "and there is often an habit of ſpeaking paſſionately,

"passionately, where the mind does not in-"tend wickedly".

Now here we wilfully run ourselves into a groſs miſtake! Thoſe unguarded and indecent ſpeeches that come with the leaſt rancour and premeditation, have indeed the leaſt guilt in them. But *that* is all that can be ſaid in their behalf---- "that they are not *ſo* "criminal as *others* may be": for *criminal* they moſt undoubtedly are, for theſe two plain reaſons---both as they are the offspring of a looſe and ill-governed mind, and as they are the cauſe of more and more evil in the ſame mind, and ſpread *that* evil in the minds of other men.

It is not properly the *mouth* that ſinneth, but the *heart* from whence the mouth ſpeaketh. Had you not ſhaken off all pious thoughts and habitual reverence of the nature and attributes of your God, you could not dare to blaſpheme his holy name, or talk ludicrouſly of his holy word, or of his providence.

Were you not inwardly defiled in your deſires, and corrupt in your inclinations; there would "no corrupt communication "proceed out of your mouth".

If your heart were kept innocent, tender, and compaſſionate; your wit and your merriment would never carry gall and bitterneſs along with it.

Why does any man allow himſelf *in lying and deceitful words*, but that he has firſt ſpoiled his taſte and love of *that* amiable thing called *truth*?

You would never ſuffer your lips to *defame* the leaſt man, nor to *flatter* the greateſt; had you not ſhamefully ſuppreſſed and ſmothered in your breaſt, the true principles of charity, humanity, honour, and virtue.

In ſhort; *ſpeech* is nothing elſe, than the child of *thought*, and the interpreter of the *will*; and *evil* ſpeaking is the progreſſion and propagation of the *vices* of the *mind*. It is the fruit of the tree:---If you make the one bad, there is all the reaſon upon earth, that you ſhould be anſwerable for the other!

Then again; be pleaſed to recollect what I remarked juſt now---that wicked words are not the only *effect* of ſin, but will be the certain and infallible *cauſe* of it, both to the ſpeaker himſelf, and to thoſe that are about him and near him. The very voice and ſound of evil things, when made familiar to

your

your ear, will wear off your averſion to them; will leſſen the veneration you had conceived for the oppoſite virtues; and, by imperceptible degrees, will reconcile you to the vices your words deſcribe.

Thus for example; what is the direct and natural conſequence of all impious reflections and "profane bablings" upon *ſacred things*, but to ſeduce the minds of the "unlearned "and unſtable" from attending to the weight of ſuch important ſubjects! to quell their fears, and heighten their preſumption! to damp the authority of the Greateſt Thing in your *judgment*, when you can once be brought to play upon it with your *tongue*, or to deride it in your fancy and imagination.

So alſo; when you laviſh your precious wit in *obſcene diſcourſe*, or in artful ſtrains of *ſatire and cenſoriouſneſs*: the ſtop is not made at your *words*---by no means! thoſe words will run through the ear into the heart: and a young perſon, in the heat of blood, and flow of his paſſions, will drop your wit, but he will retain and hold faſt the vice that accompanies it; and will cheriſh and ripen the idea, till it is brought forth into action!

So laſtly; the *falſe* and *perfidious* and *flattering* tongue *does* not, *can* not, ſpend itſelf in the mere wind of *ſpeeches*, or the froth of a few vain and empty expreſſions. Oh no! it will terminate in the ruin of trade, in the extinction of mutual credit and confidence, and in the breach of peace in families, in neighbourhoods and kingdoms!

And now I may ſafely leave it to be determined by yourſelves, "whether it be not as "reaſonable and as neceſſary, that men ſhould "hereafter ſtand or fall by what they *ſpeak*, "as by what the *act*"? Try and examine the queſtion, in every view it is capable of; either with reſpect to yourſelves, or to other men, or to God the governor and judge of us all.

The great and wiſe purpoſe of the Creator, in giving us a rational and moral nature, was---that his kingdom of righteouſneſs, truth, and holineſs, might be promoted amongſt us---that by a careful obſervance of his laws, and a conſcientious practice of our duty in the *preſent life*, we might be advanced to higher degrees of perfection and felicity in a *future* and *everlaſting ſtate*.

When

When therefore, by a profane temper of mind, and a vitious habit of thinking, you have diveſted yourſelf of all awful ſenſe of your Maker, and have inured your mouth to utter contempt and blaſphemy againſt Him; and, in the ſame breath, have contributed to blaſt the reverence which *other men* entertained of his ſacred name and ordinances;---can you imagine yourſelf qualified to be a member of *that* bleſſed kingdom above, in which the adoration of Him will be the *heaven*, and the celebration of his praiſes the *ſupreme delight* of his glorified ſervants!

Or, when your tongue has diffuſed the lewdneſs of your ſoul, and infected all about you with its impure venom; is it poſſible you can be received into any but *that* ſociety in another world, where the eternal plague and puniſhment will be this---that "he that "is unjuſt muſt be unjuſt ſtill, and he that "is filthy muſt be filthy ſtill".

Again; when your converſation and bad example have *obtained their end*, and drawn your unhappy aſſociates to be as thoughtleſs and profligate as yourſelf; is it equitable that *you* ſhould feel no vengeance, for de-

praying and ruining thoſe fellow-creatures, who, but for your enſnaring and fatal lips, might have been now at reſt in paradiſe, and have had their portion among the juſt.

Or, if your malicious *ſlander* has injured an innocent brother in his fortunes, and wounded a reputation that is dearer than life; do you, or *can* you dream all the while, that "He who made the eye cannot ſee" your inhuman actions; or that "He who made "the ear will not hear" and recompence your cruel words?

Or, if to ſerve ſome vile deſign, you have *flattered* the wicked in his wickedneſs; "ſew-"ed pillows to his arm-holes", as the ſcripture words it; that is, *ſoothed* him, and *encouraged* him, in his iniquities;----ſhall not God (the God of *truth*) behold it? And ſhall not the "Judge of all the earth" finally render to every man according to ſuch evil *words*, as well as according to all his evil *deeds*?

To turn the queſtion the other way---- When with your tongue, guided by the principles of ſerious piety and a benevolent heart, you have endeavoured to reclaim the ſinner,

and to win every companion to godlineſs, modeſty, ſobriety and charity; to a courſe of behaviour that tends to promote his own intereſt, the intereſt of religion, and the general peace and happineſs of mankind;--when your words of kindneſs have helped to lift up the heart that had no comfort, and have adminiſtered counſel and conſolation to the afflicted ſoul;----does not this generous work give you warm and delightful hopes of a bleſſing from *Him* who ruleth in righteouſneſs? And would you not think it hard to be forgotten and forſaken by *that* God, who is the "God of comfort and love, of mercy and all goodneſs?

I ſhall judge myſelf to have gained the purpoſe I had in the choice of my ſubject, if I can prevail with you to conſider, and to call frequently to your minds, the various *other* paſſages of holy ſcripture, that confirm and enforce the doctrine of the text. Theſe that follow, are a few of the principal.

"Death and life are in the power of the "tongue: and they that love it, ſhall eat "the fruit thereof. A wholſome tongue is "a tree of life: but perverſeneſs therein is

"a breach in the ſpirit. A wicked doer "giveth heed to falſe lips: and he that hath "a perverſe tongue, falleth into miſchief": ſays Solomon. And the Pſalmiſt: "what "reward ſhall be given or done unto thee, "thou falſe tongue? Even mighty and ſharp "arrows, with hot burning coals"! that is, the heavieſt and moſt exemplary of puniſhments. "He that delighteth in curſing---it "ſhall happen unto him: he that loveth not "bleſſing---it ſhall be far from him". And in the New Teſtament: "let no corrupt "communication proceed out of your mouth: "but that which is good to the uſe of edify- "ing. Let all bitterneſs, and wrath, and "*clamour*, and *evil-ſpeaking* be put away from "you; with all malice. Fornication, and "all uncleaneſs, let it not be once *named* "amongſt you, as becometh ſaints. If any "man among you ſeem to be religious, and "*bridleth not his tongue*, but deceiveth his "own heart, this man's religion is vain. In "many things we offend all. If any man "offend not in *word*, the ſame is a *perfect* "man".

The number of theſe and the like Scriptures, that are to be found in almoſt every page

page of your Bible, plainly ſpeaks the importance of the argument.

Wherefore, to conclude---If you will be your Saviour's diſciples *indeed*; if ye have any real ſenſe, or proper belief, of this his ſolemn warning, that "by your words you "ſhall be juſtified, and by your words you "ſhall be condemned"; let it be your conſtant care to demonſtrate it, in your whole converſation---in your mirth, and in your pleaſures; in company, and in buſineſs; in all your tranſactions and dealings abroad, and before your children and relations and ſervants at home!

To God only wiſe.---

SERMON

SERMON XX.

DEUTERONOMY XXX. 19.

I call heaven and earth to record this day againſt you, that I have ſet before you life and death, bleſſing and curſing: therefore chooſe life.

AS life is the foundation of all happineſs, and happineſs is the only end for which life is valuable;-----when a perſon conſiders the innate thirſt, and inſeparable deſire, which all ſenſible and rational Beings have of the former, and that the latter is the conſtant aim and object of all their actions;---he will be apt to wonder with himſelf, 'how ſuch a creature as *man* ſhould 'ſo generally fail of the very enjoyments he 'was made for;---that his nature ſhould be 'framed for the nobleſt *pleaſure*, and yet that

'in

'in the *event*, *miſery* ſhould be the portion 'of ſo great a number of our ſpecies'.

The conſideration of this ſad *effect*, without obſerving the proper *cauſe*, has led many perſons into dangerous miſtakes.

Some have concluded (or at leaſt have *ſuſpected*) that the world could not be the work of ſuch an all-wiſe and powerful and good Agent, as we call *God*; or, if there be a *firſt cauſe*, yet that the *care* and *government* of things is left at random, as *unregarded*, and beneath his notice and concern. Upon the whole; that the appearance of ſo much evil *at preſent*, and the proſpect of ſo much wretchedneſs *hereafter*, betokens ſomething greatly wanting, either in human nature itſelf, or in that hand of providence which is ſuppoſed to order and to direct it.

The words of Moſes, which I have now read to you, if they be true in themſelves, and rightly underſtood, will afford us a clear ſolution of theſe doubts. They are a ſolemn appeal to Heaven and Earth, that is, to the whole univerſe of intelligent Beings, that "God, as the ſupreme Lord and governor of "the *Jewiſh People*, had done every thing "towards their real welfare, becoming his

"own

"own moral character;---in giving them "his divine law, and the knowledge of *good* "and *evil*; in directing them to the means "of happineſs, and laying open the conſe- "quences of guilt and diſobedience; in re- "ferring *both* to their own free and unre- "ſtrained choice; and in willing, deſiring, "and exhorting, that they might make this "choice a wiſe and a dutiful one".

If the argument contained in the text, be abſtracted from the particular relation it bears to the Jewiſh Nation, and be applied to Chriſtians, and to mankind in general;---if you take it from *temporal*, and extend it to *ſpiritual*, moral, and *eternal* concerns;---it will gather new force, and gain ſtronger light, both in its premiſes, and concluſion.

In what follows therefore, I ſhall attempt to ſhew you,

I. That God Almighty, in his whole diſpenſation with chriſtians, and with *all* the ſons of men, has made the ampleſt proviſion for, and demonſtrated the moſt earneſt deſire of, our preſent as well as final well-being--- "He hath ſet before us life and "death".

II. That, notwithſtanding his ſincere intentions of our happineſs, it is abſolutely

fit and neceſſary that he ſhould leave the conditions, and the method of obtaining it, as matters of our own careful and free choice--- "*chooſe life*". From both theſe heads I ſhall infer,

III. The unpardonable folly and perverſeneſs of thoſe men, who, under the faireſt offers and opportunities of *life*, yet abuſe this liberty, and chooſe *death*.

I. God Almighty, in the character of our *Maker*, has acted every part, and done every thing for us, that can beſpeak his paternal regard to our good. In whatever view or circumſtances you conſider the life of man, this truth will diſcover itſelf in the cleareſt lines.

As we are *ſenſible* creatures, we are ſupplied with full as many *ſenſes*, as this "our "earthly tabernacle" can require: and we want no *objects*, to *gratify* thoſe ſenſes. The eye and the ear, the taſte and every organ,--- what a profuſion of varieties have they for their entertainment! and the beſt and ſweeteſt of theſe delights are what are *common to us all!*

And becauſe the *regulation* of theſe pleaſures is to be the ſubject of our *trial*, and equally

equally concerns our duty and our intereſt; what wiſe and ſalutary meaſures are taken to keep us within due bounds! while, by the very conſtruction of our bodies, and the whole courſe of providence and our own experience, we are taught that "*temperance* is the only "way, either to a true reliſh, or to a laſting "enjoyment of theſe bleſſings; and that *de*-"*bauchery* and *exceſs* are the bane of life, "and the haſtening of death". This plain leſſon of Nature, is the voice of God himſelf----the *voice* wherein He calls to us and lets us know "He hath ſet before us life and "death". And by annexing pain to intemperance, and ſprightly health to a moderate uſe of his gifts; does He not moſt manifeſtly *admoniſh* and *charge* us, "to chooſe bleſſing, "and not a curſe".

Conſider again what, and how much is done, for the happineſs of *governments*, and for the benefit and preſervation of men in *ſocieties*. What diſpoſitions are implanted in us, to humanity, and all the ſocial virtues! By how many arts and ſciences, by what ingenuity honour and fidelity, are we able, if we were but willing, to improve converſation, to make neighbourhood agreeable, to promote

promote commerce, and raiſe kingdoms to a ſtate of glory and of peace! And when luxury and licentiouſneſs are known in all fact, and in all hiſtory, to have been the ſubverſion of every body politic, that has ſuffered and encouraged them; and, on the other hand, induſtry and frugality have never failed to be the ſources of plenty and proſperity;---what is this, but the very leſſon delivered from heaven, that "righteouſneſs exalteth a nation; "and that ſin is a reproach to any people"?

If we purſue the ſame inquiry with reſpect to man as a *religious* creature,---as under obligations to certain *duties to his Creator*; and in rational expectation of being called upon by Him to *give an account of his behaviour*;---what evidences have we of God's gracious deſire of our ſupreme and everlaſting felicity!

To convince us of the Being and providence of our Maker, his works are laid before us: the order, beauty, harmony, and magnificence of the creation; the wonderful agreement of cauſes and effects; the divine nature and our own;---are all ſpread open, not only for our pleaſing contemplation, but for our neceſſary inſtruction. Our duty is conveyed to us in the very dictates of our

own hearts: and virtue and vice, with all their conſequences, are concluſions, *not* obſcure and far-fetched, but eaſy and obvious to the meaneſt capacities; being the reſult of common underſtanding, uncorrupted and honeſtly improved. Our juſt hopes and our fears, our beſt reflections and ſtrongeſt apprehenſions, point them out to our moſt ſerious conſideration. So that, as St. Paul rightly argues, "the Heathens themſelves "were inexcuſable for not ſeeing the things "of God; becauſe God had, from the be-"ginning, ſhewed them his eternal power "and Godhead".

But if it be objected, that 'the *reaſon* of 'mankind has been clouded by vice and ig-'norance and ſuperſtition'; God has abundantly ſupplied that defect, by his own *expreſs word and revelation.*

There the uncertainties of philoſophy are reſolved, and reduced to ſimple truths; and the original precepts of *reaſon* are revived, and re-eſtabliſhed by divine authority.

That the ſenſe of our *guilt* may not terrify and deter us from ſeeking after God, a *Saviour* and a *Redeemer* is ſent to us, and a free

pardon of all paſt offences proclaimed, upon conditions worthy of the honour of the divine government, and befitting the ſtate of mankind.

Moreover; to influence our *practice*, and reſtrain us from whatever is evil, not only the pureſt and plaineſt *laws* are given us, but *ſanctions* are added, to encourage and enforce the *obſervance* of them: the moſt glorious rewards are promiſed, and the moſt awful puniſhments denounced.

And to cut off all pretences about the *difficulty of complying with* what is injoined us; the chriſtian commands are diſplayed to us in the unexceptionable light of engaging and bright *examples:* human virtues are made to ſhine upon us in human life---in the lives of holy men, "of like paſſions with ourſelves"; in the ſufferings of martyrs, and in the actions and converſation of the Son of God himſelf, our teacher and lawgiver.

But one thing more, I think, needs be obſerved, to ſatisfy you of God's abſolute and impartial regard to the happineſs of men: ---namely, his own pathetic and repeated *declarations* of it, in his ſacred word. Theſe

chapters

chapters of Moſes, to which the text belongs, are an eternal monument of divine tenderneſs towards the Jewiſh Church, even with an eye to their *temporal* and *worldly* felicity. But the writings of the *Prophets* abound with inſtances of ſublimer and nobler concern; that reach beyond the preſent life, into a future one. The eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel is a perfect ſample of the reſt. How majeſtic, and yet compaſſionate, are the words of God there! "All ſouls are mine: the ſoul that "ſinneth, it ſhall die"--it *ſhall* die, it *cannot but* die, becauſe it has preſumptuouſly and wilfully forfeited its Creator's love. "But", ſays God, "have I *any pleaſure at all* that the "wicked ſhould die, and not that he ſhould "return from his ways, and live? Repent, "and turn yourſelves from all your tranſgreſ-"ſions: ſo iniquity ſhall not be your ruin. "Caſt away from you all your abominations, "and make you a new heart, and a new ſpi-"rit: for why will ye die, O houſe of Iſrael! "For I have no pleaſure in the death of "him that dieth: wherefore turn yourſelves, "and live"!

It is remarkable in this place, that men are called upon to *turn themſelves*; whereas

in other paſſages of ſcripture, their converſion is aſcribed *to God*: "*turn thou* us unto "thee, O Lord; and we ſhall be *turned*". But the ſcriptures themſelves, as well as our own common ſenſe, inform us, that *God's* converting men can ſignify no more, than his kindly *vouchſafing them* ſufficient *light* and *opportunities* to repent. And in the twenty fourth chapter of this prophet, we are more plainly told, both what *God himſelf does* in this caſe, and what He *expects from man*. "Becauſe I have purged thee, and thou waſt "not purged; thou ſhall not be purged any "more":--that is, 'ſince you have ſlighted 'and abuſed all the methods I had preſcribed 'for your recovery and reformation; you ſhall 'enjoy them no longer'. Accordingly,

II. The Second Propoſition contained in the text is, that "though God *be* thus ſin- "cerely deſirous of our happineſs; yet it is "indiſpenſably neceſſary, that He ſhould "leave the *means of attaining it*, to our own "*uſe*, and as matter of our own careful and "free *choice---chooſe life*".

And this truth will evidently appear, whether you conſider it on the part of *God*, or of *ourſelves*.

That

That God might have a kingdom of virtue and righteouſneſs, by the obedience of free and rational ſubjects, endeavouring to imitate the perfections of *Him*, their great example, and ſo to be happy in his likeneſs and favour; for this, and this only, is the end, for which the world was created. The ſtars might ſhine, and the planets roll about the heavens, to all eternity; but without reaſonable creatures to inhabit, and contemplate upon them, and to employ themſelves in praiſes and pious gratitude to their Maker, God could have no glory, and his creation no value.

But it is ſelf-evident, that without *liberty* there could be no *virtue*; and without a poſſibility of *ſin* and *miſery*, obedience would be mere blind *neceſſity*, and *happineſs* could be no *reward* at all.

Laſtly; without a ſenſe of our own *free choice*, and of our diſcretion and wiſdom in *directing* that choice, the very joys of heaven would want one main ingredient to endear, and give them ſweetneſs. For to have no remembrance that *you ever did any thing* worthy of a crown, would certainly diminiſh from the luſtre of it, even in your own eyes!

To them therefore that aſk, "why is not "the felicity of his creatures, a *free gift* of "God? Why ſhould infinite goodneſs ſet a "*price of ſervice* upon it? Why ſhould there "be any ſuch thing, as wickedneſs and pu-"niſhment"? Let the anſwer be this—"the "*natural* world moves by *compulſion*; the "*moral* one can neither be governed, nor be "happy, but by the uſe of *freedom*. *Eter-*"*nal life* is a gift *truly free*; though not "like what *arbitrary princes* often confer "upon *their* favourites, without either know-"ing their qualifications, or regarding their "merits. No! the grace of God, in the ſal-"vation of *his* faithful ſervants, is ſeen, in "giving them a reward, *not* without *any de-*"*ſert at all*, but *infinitely above* all that they "can deſerve, or aſk, or think"!

III. Nothing now remains, but the laſt article, as a concluſion from the two fore-going ones; namely, that "the only true "cauſe of mens unhappineſs, is their abuſe "of their own freedom, *by chooſing death be-*"*fore life*: and to ſhew you, wherein this "abſurd choice conſiſts".

No man can be underſtood to ſeek death and miſery *as ſuch*, and for their *own ſakes*.

We

We all prefer *pleaſure*, and follow it as naturally as a ſtone falls to the ground. The miſchief lies in the wrong and perverſe *judgment* we make of the *means* that lead to it. *Here* is room for wiſdom, or for error; for deliberate virtue, or obſtinate vice; for "bleſſing, or a curſe". We are compoſed of *reaſon* and *paſſions*; and the objects around us, are preſented to both: and to keep the *latter* in due ſubjection to the *former*, is our grand buſineſs and obligation. We have a multiplicity of temptations and external pleaſures, deſigned by providence to exerciſe and to prove us;----by a prudent enjoyment of which, we are to be entitled to ſuperior pleaſures hereafter; or are to give up the *one*, for a fond and fooliſh indulgence of the *other*. And indeed *how fooliſh* is ſuch an indulgence! even of vain and hurtful luſts, which God and Nature have ſtamped with the character of *folly*, by the mixture of *pain* that cleaves cloſe to their *preſent* gratification! Some of them impair the health of our *bodies*, and kill the appetites they raiſe. Others ſtab our *reputation*, or ruin our *affairs* and our *fortunes*: and what ruins private eſtates and private families, goes forward, in direct ſteps, to the

overthrow of kingdoms. Some vices expoſe us to the laſh of *human laws:* and we become *unfit to live*, by purſuits, whereby we madly purpoſed to be *happy*. So the Covetous and the Revengeful loſe the repoſe of the night, and the peace and comforts of the day. So the Tyrant lays a ſcheme, that ends in his own deſtruction: and the Epicure and the Libertine are digging their own graves. Yet, through inconſideracy, and a ſottiſh attachment to a darling humour, and the force of bad and inveterate habits, they perſiſt in all this miſconduct; while their own reaſon, in conjunction with every page of ſcripture, cries aloud, that 'the contrary practices 'would be the grace of their perſons, the 'credit and ornament of their preſent, and 'the ſecurity of their future and immortal 'ſtate'.

After all that has paſſed upon this argument, you ſhall be detained no longer, than to let me beg your attention to one ſingle remark; viz. "You ſee *here* an infallible "touch-ſtone, whereby each of us may try "*his own caſe*, and judge how it will *fare with* "*him in another world*".

As

As many among mankind of all times and nations, as can truly make it their plea, that they have never had the choice of *life* and *death* fairly propoſed to them;----that they have been unavoidably educated, as well as born, in ignorance;----that their notions of God, and of his true faith, have been prejudiced by *Teachers*, or corrupted and perverted by *Prieſts*;----for all, and every one of theſe, the juſt Judge of all the earth will make a merciful allowance, and will do them right.

But if, amidſt ſome errors (for *all* are prone to *errors* in this imperfect ſtate) it has been *your* lot, in the main and eſſential points of duty, to have had your way lightſome and clear;----if you have been bleſt with an underſtanding tolerably cultivated, a conſcience never blinded or violated except by your own voluntary ſins;---if you have never been reſtrained from reading and conſulting the pure word of God, nor ſeduced to put your truſt in external ceremonies, ridiculous penances, and impious abſolutions;----but have been warned by watchmen ſo tolerably honeſt, as to aſſure you, you muſt build your hope of ſalvation upon a virtuous and uſeful life, upon

on charity and good works;--and ſtill, under all theſe advantages, you wilfully chooſe vice and extravagance before prudence and ſobriety, "curſing before bleſſing, and "death before life";----if this, I ſay, ſhall prove to be *your* caſe (as pray God it may *not*) whenever you ſhall appear to receive your final doom, you will feel and own to your unſpeakable ſorrow, the fulfilling of the wiſe man's words--- "*God* made not "death; neither hath He pleaſure in the "deſtruction of the living. For He created "all things, that they might *have*" (might *enjoy* and *prolong*) their Being. But *ungodly* "*men*, with their works and words, *called it* "*to them*, and *made a covenant with it*. "And therefore they are worthy to take "their part in it".

To the King Eternal.---

SERMON

SERMON XXI.

2 PETER i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes; that by theſe you might be partakers of the divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt.

THE force and connection of theſe words will preſently be ſeen, by only turning back to the preceding verſe. "His divine "power", ſays the Apoſtle, "hath given unto "us all things that pertain to life and god-"lineſs, through the knowledge of *Him*" *(Chriſt)* "who hath called us to glory and "virtue: whereby" (by which *religion of Chriſt*---in which *goſpel-ſcheme of virtue and happineſs)* "are given unto us exceeding great "and precious promiſes; that by theſe you "might

" might be partakers of the divine nature, " having eſcaped the corruption that is in " the world through luſt".

Now here we are to obſerve three principal points.

I. *What* the promiſes of the Goſpel are; and wherein the *greatneſs* and *precioufneſs* of them is ſuppoſed to conſiſt.

II. In what ſenſe the holy Scripture declares, that chriſtians are capable of " par- " taking of the nature of *God*".

III. How theſe promiſes in Chriſt, are underſtood *to work this effect upon us*--how they *tend* to " make us partakers of the divine " nature". When theſe particulars are explained, the text will the more eaſily be applied to the improving the judgments and morals of chriſtian people.

I. The promiſes of the Goſpel for encouraging the virtuous behaviour and repentance of mankind, are expreſſed in a great diverſity of terms, and ſet forth under various figurative deſcriptions: but the ſubſtance of them all, is compriſed in *two* capital articles---- " the pardon of ſin, and the enjoyment of a " future and immortal life.".

1. Some perſons may imagine the doctrine, that "the ſins of men will be forgiven upon "their ſincere repentance", to be a matter ſo intuitively clear and certain, from conſidering the nature and attributes of God, as the merciful Creator and governor of the world; that there can be no neceſſity, no occaſion at all, for any expreſs meſſage from heaven, to acquaint us with ſo plain a truth. But herein their notion is very imperfect and erroneous. For though the goodneſs and mercy of the Supreme Being (which the mere light of reaſon, *rightly purſued*, would diſcover) might give a man fair ground of *hope* that the correction of his vices, and the amendment of his life, will both be acceptable to God, and beneficial to himſelf; yet it is ſtill but a *hope*, a rational *preſumption*; it amounts to no *abſolute proof*; nor was it ever able to remove the remains of doubt and fear and uneaſy ſuſpicion from the minds of many reſpectable Heathens, who made uſe of the ſame argument, and advanced to conſiderable degrees of moral improvement. And therefore St. Paul truly ſays of theſe Gentiles, that "through fear of death, they were all "their life-time ſubject to *bondage*".

For,

For, indeed, a man's correcting his irregularities, and diſcharging his duty for the future, is nothing more, than what he is *then* indiſpenſably obliged to. It makes no ſatisfaction, is no atonement (properly ſpeaking) for crimes that are *paſt*. It will unqueſtionably ſecure him from *farther* puniſhment: nay, it will probably *alleviate* the puniſhment *already due*; but whether it will *entirely appeaſe* the divine diſpleaſure, and for ever cancel the juſt debt, is by no means *demonſtrable*. All that is expected from a wiſe and righteous governor, is never to inflict *more than the offence deſerves*; to obſerve an exact proportion between the fault and the penalty. But whether or no it may be right in him, *wholly to forgive*, and not to puniſh *at all*; is what human reaſon can never gather with full aſſurance.

And hence it is, that the Goſpel of Chriſt is elegantly ſtiled, in ſcripture, *glad tidings* —"good tidings of great joy, which ſhall "be to all people". This is the meaning of the original word in the Greek: and our old Saxon word *Goſpel* ſignifies *welcome news*. For it proclaims "peace on earth, and good-"will towards men". It brings you the

news

news of an almighty Friend and Saviour, who comes from heaven to deliver you from *your ſins*; from the ſlavery, and from the puniſhment of them.

And thus is this *firſt branch* of the chriſtian promiſes *great* and *precious*.

And what has been ſaid upon it, may help to illuſtrate that paſſage in the eleventh chapter of the Acts, where God is ſaid to have "granted the Gentiles repentance unto life". God's *granting men repentance*, does not imply, what ſome modern enthuſiaſts have pretended to underſtand by it,—'his producing 'a mechanical converſion in their hearts, by 'a violent and ſenſeleſs *operation upon them*'; —but it means his gracious declaration, that 'if we freely and honeſtly amend our lives, 'He will mercifully accept ſuch amendment, 'and make it available to the pardon of all 'our paſt offences'.

2. The ſecond branch of the goſpel-promiſes will give you a ſtill more enlarged idea of their greatneſs and importance. It is the promiſe of a *future life*, as *life* in ſcripture language denotes complete happineſs, and every delightful circumſtance that can accompany it. It is not the mere continuance

of

of *exiſtence* after death; though the deſire even of *that* is deeply implanted in the breaſt of every man: nor is it the prolonging of the bare *animal* life, with all thoſe paſſions and ſenſual appetites we now carry about with us: but it is the perfection of our *ſpiritual* and *intellectual* part; a ſtate of improved underſtanding; of a well regulated will; of uncorrupt and pure inclinations; of wiſe deſires; and of exerciſes and employments that are truly pleaſant, and becoming the rational ſoul. This is the *life* which the Goſpel has offered to us, and which is "reſerved in "heaven for us".

You may add abundance of particular conſiderations, that will much contribute to enhance its value.

The promiſe of it is not attended with the *uncertainty*, too commonly found in the promiſes of *men*, nay of *great* men, and even of *princes* themſelves; who are often believed, when they want either power or will to perform. But *your* hope of the future and celeſtial bliſs, is placed in that 'God who can-"not lie". It was obtained for you by the life and death and atonement of the *Son* of God. It is fixed upon a foundation ſtrong

as

as the love which God bears to his own "Beloved in whom we are accepted," and never-failing as the truth of *Him* who is truth itſelf.

Such a life as this would be a great and a noble gift, even if it were to laſt but a few years. To have it given to a *ſinner*, though a repenting one, makes it to be a mercy worthy of Heaven itſelf. Should you add to it a million, or only a thouſand years; how would the bounty be magnified, in your grateful apprehenſion! But when you once join *eternity* to it, all is done---you are loſt in the imagination of your own felicity; and greatneſs itſelf is ſwallowed up in the illimitable ocean!

II. Let us now conſider the *deſign* and *effect* of theſe promiſes of the Goſpel----the purpoſe of them is, to render us "partakers "of the divine nature": that is, to bring our minds, our tempers and diſpoſitions, to ſome likeneſs and reſemblance of the Divine Being.

There needs nothing more than common ſenſe to convince you, that this is not to be interpreted of any ſimilitude or proportion we can poſſibly bear to the *natural* attributes of

God: it has reſpect only to the *moral* perfections of the Deity: and even to *them*, with all juſt allowance for the limited capacities of frail and finite creatures. In the exerciſe of creative and almighty power, every Being in heaven and earth muſt appear equally and infinitely below Him. In unbounded knowledge, and unerring wiſdom, Angels and Archangels bear no reſemblance to him: and "He chargeth his Angels with folly".

But in his juſtice, truth, and goodneſs; in his mercy, compaſſion, and long ſuffering; all intelligent Beings throughout the univerſe may imitate him: and in *theſe*, it is both their duty and their glory to be like Him. He is the fountain, ſtandard, and pattern of all moral excellency: and his conduct towards all his free and reaſonable creatures, in loving, pardoning, and doing them good, ſhould be *their* univerſal law and example in all their dealings, intercourſe, and converſation with each other.

And thus far the pious and learned Heathens had juſt ſentiments of religion; which, indeed, can hardly eſcape any conſiderate, and tolerably cultivated mind. They held, that

that "to do good, is to act like the all-per-"fect Being; and to be virtuous, is to re-"ſemble the Gods". And again; "the beſt "worſhip you can pay to God, is to be like "Him in your temper".

And accordingly, the holy ſcriptures urge it upon us, as the nobleſt argument and incitement to virtue;---that "God, in whoſe "image we were created, is himſelf abſo-"lutely good; and that, "by benevolence, "and charity and forgiveneſs of our *brother*, "we ſhall be the *children* of our Father who "is in heaven, and ſhall be perfect as *He* is "perfect".

This imitation of the divine moral character is ſtiled by St. Paul, in his epiſtle to the Hebrews, being "partakers of God's *ho-"lineſs*"; and by St. Peter here in the text, being "partakers of his *divine nature*"; which are therefore manifeſtly one and the ſame thing.

III. How, and in what manner, the promiſes of God conduce to the forming in us this reſemblance of Himſelf, will be readily apprehended.

Promiſes and perſuaſives, denunciations and threatnings, can operate no otherwiſe

upon a rational and free Agent, than as they ſerve to excite his attention, to awaken his fears, to animate and ſpur him to action and good endeavours. The goſpel-motives will appear moſt effectual to this end, upon every heart that does not wilfully harden itſelf againſt them, in whatever light they can be conſidered.

Man is a creature that muſt be encouraged to his duty by the hope of a reward, by the proſpect of ſome *good* to accrue from it. Now *life* is the baſis of all good: *happineſs of life* has every encouragement in it, that can be conceived to influence a creature to any courſe of action.

Again; Man was formed with *affections*, as well as *reaſon*: and *both* muſt be wrought upon, in order to bring him to the love and practice of virtue. Hence it is, that the divine promiſes not only contain the greateſt bleſſings, but are given to us with ſo much *tenderneſs* and *kindneſs*, and with ſuch *engaging circumſtances*; that the happineſs propoſed to us in another world, is painted in *figures* and *alluſions* ſo extremely proper to *win our affections*; that nothing more could be added on

on God's part, to exerciſe every faculty and endeavour in us, after real goodneſs.

For inſtance--- We are promiſed, that if we will ſtrive to reſemble our Creator in righteouſneſs and true holineſs, He *will receive and embrace us as his children:* will make us *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt*, in a *kingdom which cannot be moved*, in an inheritance *undefiled, and that fadeth not away*;--- that if to the beſt of our power, we copy the divine perfections in *this* life, *we ſhall be rewarded with another life* wherein *all our perfections will be exalted*, and *every faculty refined*; wherein we ſhall be for ever *growing in grace and felicity*, by growing continually more and more like Him, by ſeeing Him, and being *bleſſed with his preſence in which there is fulneſs of joy.*

Thus are our pleaſure and our duty indiſſolubly united; each part of our compoſition is wiſely conſidered; our moſt generous paſſions are conſulted, together with our reaſon; and God has done every thing befitting a conſummate governor over moral and free ſubjects, to induce us to "partake of "his holineſs", and thereby of his heavenly happineſs.

The ſenſe of the text being thus explained, I would *now* make an *application* of it, in one or two obſervations.

1. From the promiſes of God given to us in ſcripture, and their expediency towards a religious life; you may ſee the vanity and whimſical affectation of thoſe Moraliſts, who maintain that "the love of ourſelves, a view "of our own *intereſt*, and the ſerving of God "in hope of any *recompence*, deſtroy the eſ- "ſence of virtue, or at leaſt greatly diminiſh "from its luſtre and purity". As if it were poſſible to ſeparate Virtue from the final intereſt of her followers. Or as if the very reliance upon God; the hope and truſt in Him for our future recompence; a hope, that carries us to the imitation of his perfections, and makes us "partakers of his "divine nature";----as if *this*, I ſay, were not itſelf a *virtue*, and the parent of the moſt generous and ſublime virtues!

How can it be improper, in truth how can it but be highly requiſite, that a creature, whoſe appetites are ſo often at war with his judgment, who is liable to the daily and hourly influences of temptation and bad examples,

amples, ſhould be actuated and ſupported by hopes and by promiſes?

When Moſes therefore refuſed the honours of the Egyptian court, becauſe "he had re-"ſpect unto the recompence of the reward"; when chriſtians are exhorted to "look unto Jeſus, "and to his glorious appearance"; nay, and when Jeſus himſelf is ſaid to have "endured the croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame, "for the *joy that was ſet before him*";---in all theſe accounts, the *ſcriptures* throw no diſparagement upon human virtue. *Thoſe perſons* diſparage it rather, who imagine it to be any more inconſiſtent with goodneſs in *man* to *hope* for a reward, than it is with the goodneſs of *God* to *be the* "*rewarder* of "them that diligently ſeek Him".

2. My ſecond remark from the foregoing explanation of the text is,--- "how eaſy and "obvious it is, to enter into the genuine ſpi-"rit and deſign of all ſaving religion, and "of chriſtianity in particular".

The intent of revelation is not to fill the *head* with ſpeculative notions and abſtruſe doctrines, nor the *heart* with zeal for the forms and ceremonies of worſhip; but to better our *morals*, and to direct our *practice*;

that "we may become partakers of the di-
"vine nature, by keeping ourſelves pure from
"*corruptions which are in the world through*
"*luſt*".

3. And as this is the grand object of God's holy word and promiſes; hence every man may draw a ſafe rule, whereby to meaſure all his *hopes*, aud reliance upon thoſe promiſes, and to judge how far they are well or ill founded.

There is no chriſtian, that has any *meaning at all* in profeſſing his religion, but feeds his mind with a proſpect of *ſome* ſhare in the benefits and rewards of it: and it would be deemed a ſevere lecture, to exclude any one of you from ſo precious an expectation. But, at the ſame time, it infinitely concerns you all, to be well aſſured upon what ground you ſtand. Do you *verily* truſt in God, for the bleſſings of another life? Examine *that* truſt of yours, by the *fruits* it has produced. What good *effects* has your hope had upon you? Has it quickened your endeavours to merit the bleſſings you wiſh to receive? Has it made you partakers of God's holineſs *here*, that you may be ſo *hereafter*? Has the ſenſe of *His* truth, juſtice, goodneſs

and

and mercy, prevailed with you to "put on "bowels of mercy" to your fellow creatures; to "ſpeak truth with your neighbour" and to "do good even to your enemy"? If *ſuch* be your caſe, you may *indeed* have hope, and a "hope full of immortality"!

But if your *faith* and *confidence* be no better than this---'that you may get to heaven 'ſome way or other, with all your luſts and 'vices about you'; and may be accepted in *Chriſt*, though you never were a *follower of God*;---be not deceived! For though you may eaſily delude *yourſelf*, *God* cannot poſſibly *thus* be mocked!

All your *other* accompliſhments may render you a man of the world, a man of buſineſs, or a man of ſcience: but Heaven is the reward of none but the *good* man.

And had you the knowledge of the deepeſt philoſopher, or the learning of the ableſt ſcholar that ever lived; could you trace out the wondrous motions of all the heavenly bodies, and the orbit of every ſtar in the firmament; nay, could you unfold every ſacred myſtery, and explain every text in the book of God; I will go yet farther (even as far as the holy ſcripture itſelf carries me) had you

faith,

faith, to cure all diſeaſes, to caſt out devils, and even to remove mountains; if you could ſpeak with the tongues of men, and of angels; ſtill, had you the eloquence without the virtue, and all the gifts of St. Paul without St. Paul's charity; you would be in the very exact condition he has ſo emphatically deſcribed - - - - you would become "a mere "ſounding braſs, and a tinkling cymbal".

Turn over your bible as long as you pleaſe, you will find no ſuch promiſe in it, as "bleſ-"ſed are the learned, bleſſed are the ingenious, or the politic;" nor yet "bleſſed are the "zealots for the articles of their church, "or the formalities of devotion"; no not "bleſſed are the very propheciers, or the "workers of miracles in the name of Chriſt"; but "bleſſed are the *merciful*, for they ſhall "obtain mercy: bleſſed are the *pure in heart*, "for they ſhall ſee God: bleſſed are the "*peace-makers*, for they ſhall be the children "of God"---they ſhall be the children of his kingdom, and the children of the reſurrection.

To him be glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XXII.

LUKE xvii. 1.

It is impoſſible but that offences will come: but wo unto him through whom they come.

OUR bleſſed Lord, whoſe religion in the ancient prophecies is ſtiled "glad "tidings", the "Goſpel of peace", the "kingdom of heaven", the "kingdom of "righteouſneſs and love"; wherein "the "wolf ſhould dwell with the lamb, and "the leopard ſhould lie down with the kid, "and none ſhould hurt or deſtroy in all his "holy mountain";---yet, I ſay, this ſame Saviour aſſures us, He "came not to ſend "*peace* on earth, but a *ſword*"; that his doctrine would ſet "the ſon againſt the father, "and the father againſt the ſon"; and that "great offences would come".

But

But let us not apprehend theſe accounts to be contradictory, or irreconcileable to each other. For ſome of theſe paſſages intend only to deſcribe the *natural temper* and *tendency* of the chriſtian doctrine; how peaceable and happy the world would be, *provided* men would embrace and practiſe it; what a ſpirit of unanimity and love it breathes forth in the whole ſcheme of it; and how effectual it would be to this gracious deſign, in all ſuch as *ſincerely believed* and *lived according* to it.

Others of theſe ſcriptures foretell the contrary *event*, which would *actually happen* through the preverſeneſs and iniquity of thoſe men, who can abuſe the moſt ſignal mercies, and change the higheſt bounties of heaven into the deepeſt curſes.

Laſtly, many of the texts abovementioned, ſpeak, and are to be underſtood, *not* of the *firſt reception*, or the *early progreſs* of Chriſt's kingdom and religion; but of the full and *final completion* of it, here upon earth:----when it ſhall glorioufly and univerſally prevail, in truth and righteouſneſs; and divine providence ſhall ſhew it to be a wonderful

wonderful and happy balance to all the former iniquities of mankind.

In the mean while, the ſame divine providence ſuffers it *ſo* to be, that "great offences come"; to the ſeeming hindrance and prevention of the beneficial effects of this heavenly and charitable religion.

As there is nothing in the ſacred ſcriptures, more carefully inſiſted upon, more ſolemnly ſet forth, or more ſeverely forbidden, than the ſin of *giving offence*; I will beg of you to hearken to what I ſhall ſay upon it, both with reſpect to the chriſtian church at large, and as it may be brought home to ourſelves, and our own times, in particular. But, before I enter into either of theſe topics, it will be proper to give you a brief explanation of the *terms* of the text.

"Offences will come"--Our Engliſh word *offence* is a very inferior and imperfect tranſlation of the original phraſe, in theſe and the like places. By *offending* a perſon, we uſually mean no more, than *vexing*, *grieving*, or *diſobliging* him: and an *offence* againſt *God*, generally ſignifies ſome action that is contrary to his known will and command, and conſequently

ſequently diſpleaſing to him. But, with regard to our *neighbour*, the holy ſcriptures uſe this term in a leſs common and more criminal acceptation. In theſe writings, it denotes a *ſtumbling block*, any *ſnare* or *trap* that is laid in a man's way, on purpoſe to give him a *fall*; to retard, and ſtop him and turn him from his paſſage. So it repreſents any act, or diſcourſe, or doctrine, or manner of life, that is calculated to leſſen the eſteem, or obſtruct the advancement of true religion, among mankind;---that not barely *frets* and *diſcompoſes*, but *prejudices*, and *ſeduces* the minds of other men from a *good opinion* of it;---that abates the reverence they would otherwiſe entertain of it, and cauſes them to *tranſgreſs* it, or even to *renounce* and *forſake* it. Thus our Saviour tells his diſciples, "all ye ſhall be *offended* becauſe of me this "night"---' ye ſhall *deſert* and *deny* me'. And the "Phariſees were *offended* at him", that is, they *diſowned* and *rejected* him. In the ſame ſenſe, the croſs of Chriſt is called the "*offence* of the croſs;" which is elſewhere better tranſlated "a *ſtumbling block* to the Jews, a *rock* of offence and of *falling*"----*the Jews ignorantly and wickedly made*

it

it to be ſo. And, with relation to the behaviour of chriſtians to each other, *St. Paul's* command, in his epiſtle to the Romans, expreſſes the true notion of *our Saviour* in the text: "let no man", ſays the Apoſtle, "put a *ſtumbling block*, "or an occaſion to fall" (*to fall away from chriſtianity*) "in his "brother's way".

Well; but how are we to take our Lord's meaning, when he affirms, that "it is *impoſſible* but that offences will come"? *Man* is a creature endued with freedom of mind, with the knowledge of good and evil, and with liberty of willing and acting: and *Chriſtians* are bleſt with ſo much light and grace, to direct this liberty; that ſurely there can be no *ſtrict neceſſity* for any man to ſin; no *conſtraint* upon any perſon to bring odium and diſcredit on his holy profeſſion, by any *ſingle enormous crime*, much leſs by a *ſeries* of profligacy and wickedneſs. All this is undeniably true; and ſufficiently demonſtrates that the word *impoſſible* muſt not be interpreted in the *ſtrict* and *literal* ſenſe, and implies only a great degree of *danger* and *difficulty*: which is abundantly verified by the uſe of it in other parts of ſcripture.

When

When our Saviour declares it to be *impoſſible* for "a rich man to enter into the "kingdom of heaven", he immediately *tempers* his meaning---"how *hard* it is for them "that *truſt* in riches, to enter into the king-"dom of God"! And when St. Paul pronounces of an apoſtate chriſtian, that "it is *impoſſible* to renew him again "unto repen-"tance"; reaſon and facts and experience will convince you, he could deſign nothing more, than ſtrongly to paint the *hazard* and *improbability*. And thus it is in the *text: men* are under no *compulſion* to do evil; and *chriſtians* enjoy the beſt advantages upon earth, for avoiding every inſtance of ſcandalous and ſinful behaviour. But *all* are *men* ſtill; and, conſidering the ſtate of the world, the number of temptations, the infirmities of ſome, the paſſions, ambition, and wilful obſtinacy of others; it cannot be *expected*, it cannot well be *ſuppoſed*, it muſt not be *hoped*, but that vices will more or leſs prevail, and "*of-*"*fences will come*".

After this illuſtration of the two principal phraſes in the text, let me *now* proceed to ſpeak of this crime of *giving ſcandal to religion*,

I. By

I. By obſerving to you, what were the grand occaſions of injury and diſreputation to Chriſtianity, in the *primitive and early ages*; and making ſome ſuitable reflections upon it in *that light*.

II. By taking the ſame matter into conſideration with regard to *ourſelves and our own times*.

III. By remarking the wo, which our Lord denounces againſt *all ſuch* as ſhall be found to have been the *authors* of it: "Wo "unto *him through whom* they come".

I. The pure and peaceable religion of the Goſpel was no ſooner delivered to the world, but great offences were given, both by *believers* and *unbelievers*; to the unſpeakable hurt of its intereſt, and ſalutary influences upon the hearts of men. When the Son of God "came to his own, his own received "Him not". The *Jews*, his own people and countrymen, were the firſt that ſcandalized his doctrine, and compaſſed the death of their heavenly Teacher. They were the ring-leaders of all the calumny and miſrepreſentation and miſery, that befell thoſe, who were ſent to preach them into charity, and convert them to happineſs.

When this ſame Goſpel had made its entry into the *Heathen* quarters of the globe, how many eſtabliſhed prejudices, what darling paſſions, and long applauded vices, had it to encounter! And how much blood was ſpilt to gain it credit and attention with thoſe ſons of ignorance and wickedneſs!

But happy, comparatively ſpeaking, would it have been, if *this* had been *all*; and if the religion of Chriſt had felt no wounds, but from profeſſed enemies. But alas! there appeared as numerous offences *in* the church, as *out* of it! You cannot read the New Teſtament, but you every where ſee the moſt melancholy prophecies and hiſtories of the *offenſive ſpirit*, that reigned among the original converts to our holy faith.

The Romans and Galatians were all ſet on fire by a parcel of jewiſh zealots, who would hear of no chriſtianity without circumciſion and jewiſh ceremonies. The Corinthians divided themſelves into factions and parties, upon frivolous diſputes whether they ſhould follow Chriſt, or Cephas, or Paul, or Apollos; though their great Apoſtle was perpetually cautioning them againſt the fatal imprudence of theſe animoſities, and calling upon them to "walk in wiſdom towards them that are

"without", to "receive *one another* as *Chriſt* "received *us*", to "give no *offence* in any "thing, that the miniſtry might not be "blamed"--- 'that chriſtianity might not 'be evil thought of, and evil ſpoken of, in 'the world'.

When the Apoſtles were gone off the ſtage, the hiſtory of *giving offences* does not at all improve, or mend upon our hands. It was not long, before the Biſhops and paſtors of the flocks became tainted with the love of power and pre-eminence; and piety decayed, as the luſt of rule increaſed. Indeed *perſecution* from their *public enemies* kept many chriſtians together, and *forced* them to live in tolerable peace and friendſhip. But as ſoon as ever *kings* and *emperors* came into the church, and brought in riches and preferments along with them; inſtead of dutiful and religious gratitude to God, and the honour of Chriſt Jeſus; what ſtrifes and contentions, what hatred and ſcandals aroſe, about "who were moſt orthodox", and "who ſhould be uppermoſt"! They met in councils, only to ſquabble, and revile and confound one another: they got the civil powers to revenge theſe fooliſh enmities;

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and the ſword of the prince took place of the true "ſword of the ſpirit, and the word of "the Goſpel".

Thus it went on for ſome time, in the *eaſtern* parts of the chriſtian world; till at at laſt a cunning and daring impoſtor had the artifice to dreſs up a *new* religion, ſuited exactly to the taſte of his weak and vicious followers: He raiſed a formidable power: the infatuated chriſtians, in their quarrels and battles, called and let in that power amongſt them; where, by a juſt judgment, it rules and triumphs to this day. And all thoſe famous churches you read of in the New Teſtament, Galatia, Corinth, Philippi, Epheſus, Theſſalonica, Smyrna, remain poor deſolate villages, with a few wretched ſuperſtitious chriſtians, under the tyranny and oppreſſion of Mahomet and his ſucceſſors. "They "walked not in the light---ſo their candleſtick is taken from them".

Turn your eye now to the *weſtern* regions of Chriſt's church, during the ſame ages; and behold the like fruits of the like *ſcandalous* and *offenſive* principles!

All the while that the eaſtern chriſtians were devouring each other, to be *all* devoured by a common adverſary; the Roman Empire

was dwindling and decaying. The northren nations poured in upon it, with their forces, and their vices. The Roman Biſhops in the mean time, "fiſhed in theſe troubled wa-"ters", to get eccleſiaſtical lawleſs dominion over the minds of chriſtians. They attained it at length, by treachery and bloodſhed. Then their ſucceſſors invented ſuch a ſet of doctrines, and ſuch a form of worſhip, as put them into ſecure poſſeſſion of the underſtandings, eſtates and conſciences of their fellow-chriſtians; and continue to this hour an *effectual ſcandal*, to keep both the Jew and the Mahometan in an utter abhorrence of Chriſt and of his religion. And from this moſt flagrant of all *offences*, this crueleſt of all bondage, the Reformation from Popery has ſet this happy nation free.

I have drawn up this ſhort and ſummary account of *ſcandal* in the paſt ages of chriſtianity, to introduce a few *reflections* which I think it will afford for your practical inſtruction.

And, 1, "we ſee here, how much the "beſt and nobleſt cauſe is liable to *ſuffer*, "and to be defeated of ſucceſs, by the in-"gratitude and iniquity of mankind: and

" how far the choiceſt bleſſings may be loſt,
" and turned to the evil and reproach of a
" ſinful world. But we are taught alſo,
" that none of theſe ſad events, nothing of
" this ill ſucceſs of the Goſpel, ought in the
" leaſt to diminiſh our veneration, or to ſhock
" our belief, of it". Should a queſtion there-
fore be propoſed to us--- ' Since ſo many
' have been the *ſcandals* and *offences*, and ſo
' few and ſlender the good influences of the
' chriſtian doctrine; what advantage has
' mankind reaped from it; and why might
' not the world have been as happy without
' it';---the anſwer is ready, and manifeſt.
As *reaſon* and *underſtanding* and *liberty* are,
and were always *deemed*, the moſt valuable
gifts of Heaven, though the bulk of mankind
has for ſo many generations depraved and
perverted them, and ran themſelves into ido-
latry, wickedneſs and ſlavery; ſo in like man-
ner had more iniquity prevailed in the *chriſ-
tian world*, than has hitherto done; and
though greater numbers had " ſold them-
" ſelves under ſin"; yet St. Paul's argument
ſtands firm and unſhaken---- " the law is
" nevertheleſs holy and juſt and good". And
as *reaſon* and *underſtanding* were, in the worſt

of

of times, the guide and ſafeguard of many an honeſt man; ſo has the *Goſpel* enlightened and ſaved ſuch numbers of the faithful, as will ſhew it in the end to be a mercy infinitely worthy of the goodneſs of God and of Chriſt, to bring it down from heaven to a degenerate and vitiated world.

But, 2, be pleaſed to conſider, that 'there 'may often be as great fault and folly in un-'reaſonably *taking* offence, as in *giving it*'. For what if *falſe religion* has too frequently and generally obtained; are therefore *true religion*, and its plain obligations, become *null and void?* What if many chriſtians have worſhipped idols; may *we* therefore innocently commit ſacrilege? If whole churches have ſunk themſelves in bigottry and darkneſs; can *we* without guilt and ſhame refuſe to follow the bleſſed light that is before us? The caſe is too evident, to need any reply!

3. Then, let us obſerve "that theſe "evils, thus abounding in the chriſtian "world, are really ſo far from being any "objection againſt our holy religion, that "they prove one of the ſtrongeſt demon-"ſtrations of its truth, and divine authori-"ty". For all theſe are the very things that

were exactly foretold, preciſely deſcribed, and moſt affectionately lamented, by the author of it himſelf, by his prophets, apoſtles, and preachers. The ſame all-wiſe Being, who has permitted the offences of ungodly men, has at the ſame time, and by theſe ſame offences, confirmed his Word in the heart of every pious and conſiderate chriſtian.

For who could poſſibly have foreſeen, and pointed out to his diſciples, what treatment they ſhould meet with in the courſe of their miniſtry; what deaths He himſelf and *they* ſhould die; what vengeance would fall, and *when* and *how* it *ſhould* fall, upon the Jewiſh Nation, that raiſed the firſt offence and oppoſition againſt him;---who could, ſo many hundred years before the accompliſhment, have drawn out in an amazing ſucceſſion, the conditions and circumſtances of the chriſtian church, the revolutions and corruptions it ſhould undergo; the perſecutions and apoſtacies; the times and places and people when and where and by whom all ſhould be brought to paſs, from *their* days to the preſent;---who, I ſay, could poſſibly do *all this*, but one that was ſent from God, and ſuch as were truly inſpired by Him?

So

So then, as the unprosperous state of christianity, may give us pain to think of it; let us be comforted by remembring, that it brings with it the marks of God's own hand, sealing the truth of *his* and *our* Gospel!

4. But lastly; "let the view we have taken of the foregoing abuses, admonish us all "of the dreadful guilt and consequences of "causing *scandal* to the Faith we ought to *adorn*". I have laid before you what the writers of the New Testament, and those of the ages following, have recorded in this matter, on purpose to remind you that all "these things were written for our sakes, "and for our ensamples"; and that the same vices and offences, which ruined whole churches, and called down the wrath of Heaven upon *ancient* nations and kingdoms, can never fail to produce the same effect upon *us!* With this *difference* only, that as *we* have been favoured with more numerous warnings, and are more fully instructed by the exemplary sufferings of those who have gone before us; our unrepented crimes will be the heavier, and our fall the greater!

SERMON XXIII.

LUKE xvii. 1.

It is impoſſible but that offences will come: but wo unto him through whom they come.

WHEN I had explained the meaning of the two principal expreſſions in the text, and ſhewn you what the ſcripture language intends by the word *offence*, and in what ſenſe our Lord declares "it is *impoſſible* "but that offences will come";--I purpoſed to ſpeak of this great crime of "bringing "ſcandal upon religion" in a ſort of *general* and *hiſtorical* way, with reſpect to the *former* and *earlier* times of the Chriſtian Church; ſetting before your eyes the miſchievous conſequences that attend it: from whence I drew

ſuch

ſuch reflections, as I thought might be of ſervice to your practical admonition and inſtruction.

The remaining parts of what I then undertook are,

II. "To treat of this deſtructive vice, as "it belongs more immediately to *ourſelves*, "and our *own times*:

III. "To remark the ſpecial *wo* our Lord "has *here* denounced againſt all ſuch as ſhall "be found guilty of it".

In the comprehenſive ſin of *ſcandal*, or of injuring the reputation and hindring the advancement of true religion among mankind, many actions and inſtances of behaviour are common to *all ages*---the ſame in the primitive days, as in our own. Both Ancients and Moderns have been ſeen to hurt their Saviour's cauſe, in a vaſt variety of conduct;--in things *indifferent*, when indiſcreetly managed, and raſhly indulged; and in things *directly immoral*, that ought never to be indulged at all;---in acts committed with a plain deſign to bring his Goſpel into contempt; or elſe in ſuch as will be certain to do ſo amongſt ignorant and thoughtleſs men, though committed with no ſuch expreſs deſign.

A man

A man that runs into unguarded liberties in matters innocent in *themſelves*, may not only *vex* and *diſpleaſe* another perſon, but may really *offend* him, and *draw him into evil*. Many honeſt minds are of an inferior ſize, and of a ſhallow gage of underſtanding: and the freedoms *you* take in points which *they* ſuſpect to be *ſinful*, may embolden them to violate their own conſcience: and while *you* are ſecure and fearleſs in your *knowledge*, you may, by your *example*, lead *them* into preſumption. And it often happens, that our fooliſh zeal about what is no eſſential article of true religion, occaſions men of looſe principles to throw off all concern for any religion at all.

In the *firſt churches* of Rome, Galatia, and Corinth, what *offences* were given and received, about *meats* and *drinks* and *feſtival days*! And *we* have ſometimes made ourſelves the very pictures of thoſe injudicious old chriſtians, when we were ready to pull one another in pieces about *forms* and *habits* and *ceremonies*: while the Infidel ſtood ſmiling, the Jew laughed, and all *ſenſible believers* were grieved and offended!

How

How effectually would the advice of St. Paul have cured both *them* and *us!* "I "know" ſays he, "that the kingdom of "God is not meat and drink; that an idol "is nothing, and that a day is nothing. But "to go to an idol-feaſt, and entice another "man thither *againſt his own weak judgment*, "and ſo to deſtroy *him* for whom Chriſt "died---No! I would eat no fleſh while the "world ſtandeth, rather than make my bro-"ther to offend". Here, now, is an excellent rule of charity--'A man of underſtanding ſhould be cautious in the uſe of what 'is *lawful*, for fear that men of *no* underſtanding ſhould ſtretch it into what is *unlawful*.

But my principal view in the choice of this text was, to take notice of thoſe criminal ways of converſation, by which a ſcandal is *now* moſt apt to be caſt upon our chriſtian profeſſion---vices that I cannot indeed ſay are peculiar to our age, or to our country; but which I may ſafely venture to affirm are a peculiar diſgrace and reproach to that eminent degree of light and learning and knowledge and liberty, with which this nation has

long

long been bleſt. And here, what offence ſhall I begin with, or where ſhall I make an end!

1. Profaneſs, and the modiſh taſte of *ridiculing* things and perſons held to be *ſacred*, appears calculated to *ſcandalize* the *whole* chriſtian cauſe. Thoſe flights of the tongue proceed from the very heart; and naturally tend to decoy your companions into the ſame irreverent and contemptuous opinion of the maxims of piety, with the man that vents them. Now *this* is to offend *indeed*, in every view it is capable of.

If, on the one ſide, the air and affectation of *wit*, that accompanies this manner of diſcourſing or writing, ſerves to recommend it, or only to render it tolerable, to *ſome* perſons; the effect muſt be, that it will inſtill and ſpread the poiſon of looſe and profligate notions, and efface the juſt regard which every uncorrupt mind entertains for things ſerious and important.

Or if, on the other ſide, it begets that indignation and abhorrence, which always ariſe from ſuch occaſions in grave and maſculine ſpirits; how notoriouſly are they diſobliged and *offended!* Who ought not only

to

to be guarded from inſult, by the laws of God, and of their country; but have an equal right to protection with all other men, from the laws of civil converſation and good breeding!

On either ſuppoſition, profaneſs is ſuch a *ſcandal* to human ſociety, that though it is no wonder ſome creatures are wild and wicked enough to offer it; it is a prodigy to find it paſs unheeded and unrevenged; I do not ſay where there is a *chriſtian power* to reſtrain its waſteful fury, but even where there is ſo much as the *name* of cultivation, or policy, or government.

2. Again; what can be more *ſcandalous*, either in itſelf or its circumſtances, than the unmanly ſin of *drunkenneſs?* A ſin, the preſent effects of which are ſo uneaſy, and its more diſtant conſequences ſo ruinous to perſons, to families, and neighbourhoods; that the loweſt tribe of people would be ſuperior to ſo mad and deſpicable a paſſion, were they not countenanced and led forward by too many precedents of *better* and *higher* degree. In the mean time, wherever, or from whatever ſource, this practice becomes the vogue, and riſes into faſhion; what tongue can deſcribe

the

the ſhame and confuſion it muſt reflect upon the whole face of religion; whoſe glorious and only object is, to teach men the conqueſt of themſelves and their appetites, and to induce us to "live *ſoberly*, righteouſly and godly, in this preſent world"!

3. Farther; when ſome perſons talk of gratifying their *luſts*, and carrying on their *lawleſs intrigues*, in an artful ſtile, and with a ludicrous turn, that bids defiance to all honour and decency; is it their intention to reconcile their neighbours to lewdneſs, by putting modeſty out of all countenance? Or do they only mean to teſtify the averſion they have to what is good, by deſignedly affronting it before thoſe, whom they know to hold it in the higheſt veneration? In *either* and *all* lights, it is beyond expreſſion rude, irrational, and offenſive.

4. What ſhall I ſay of the crying enormity of *blaſpheming the name of God* by paſſionate oaths, and violent imprecations---a language made ſo habitual to many, as if they were the firſt words they had learned from their cradles! This may, perhaps, often be done, without any ſettled determination to anger

their Maker, or ſcandalize his ſacred laws. Yes; I can allow they may not *intend* to "provoke the Lord to anger", becauſe they never think at all about Him. But let me entreat them to remember, that, whether they *intend* this or not, the dreadful *event* is very nearly the ſame----a moſt pernicious and univerſal *ſcandal is given*. For, be they weak brethren, or ſtrong; *all* are injured, all are *offended* by it! Perſons that underſtand or conſider little about their Creator and their duty, muſt of neceſſity have their awe and fear, their whole religious idea of the infinite Majeſty relaxed, and even baniſhed out of their minds, by ſuch an audacious familiarity with that tremendous Name. And they that are not *infected* by your words, cannot but be *grieved* and *tormented* at the abuſe of *that*, wherein *they* place all their devotion, their hope, admiration, comfort, and happineſs!

5. I muſt here paſs over many other inſtances of *ſcandal*: ſuch as the *immoderate and raging thirſt after riches*, heaped up either for no uſe at all, or (which is yet rather worſe) to pamper the pride and luxuries and

vices

vices of life: ſhewing to all the world, what a common and an eaſy thing it is for a chriſtian, to carry a *face* as if he meant to go to heaven, when his *heart* all the while is grovelling upon the earth!

6. I will detain your thoughts with but one branch more of *offenſive* behaviour; that ſeems to be growing to a formidable height amongſt us---namely, the *breach of the ſabbath*, and the neglect of the public worſhip of God.

Mankind are too prone *of themſelves* to forget their Saviour, and the things that concern *his* honour, and *their own* future happineſs. But whither will all the inferior and more ignorant part of them be carried, if they are encouraged and authoriſed in their impiety by *faſhionable and great examples*? They will undoubtedly conclude they are perfectly ſafe, as long as they ſee they are upon a level with the men, who are eſteemed ſo much wiſer and better than themſelves! And it is but a poor ſhare of credit, that can be expected to be gained to any religious inſtitution; when the very people that ſhould ſupport it, are the foremoſt to throw contempt upon its ſolemn worſhip and ſervices!

But enough of this ſad miſconduct! Let us look a while upon the *wo*, our bleſſed Redeemer has here pronounced againſt it.

III. The honeſt philoſophy of an *Heathen moraliſt* might ſatisfy a man (how lamentable is it, that any who are called *chriſtians* ſhould want to be advertiſed of it) that "we are "not born for *ourſelves alone*". And therefore we neither do nor can poſſibly, live and act for *our own* benefit or miſchief *only*; but for that of *others*, perhaps of *abundance* of others, alſo. This is the language of nature, of reaſon, and experience. And if the Goſpel had been quite ſilent in all the warm precepts it has given us about "our love of "the brethren", and the tenderneſs due to all mankind; Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch could inform you, that "whoever conducts "the actions of his life without regard to "the weakneſſes and infirmities of the world "about him, it is pity he ever came into it".

You cannot converſe, I do not ſay wickedly, but not even imprudently, *by yourſelf alone:* your neighbours, at leaſt your *equals* and *aſſociates*, will feel it, and be corrupted by it: and to live merely to your own humour, is in truth to be unfit to live at all!

Well;

Well; but our good Maſter plainly foreſaw what evils would ariſe, and has provided the moſt effectual means and terrors to prevent them. He has warned us, that "He "will ſend his Angels; and they ſhall ga-"ther out of his kingdom all things that "offend"----gather them in a terrible ſenſe, as *you* gather *weeds* out of your garden, to be caſt away, and periſh! "Wo be to the "World", ſays He, "becauſe of offences"--A threatning that has, and cannot but have, a ſpecial relation to the ſeveral characters and ſituations of men, which afford them opportunities of doing greater good or more extenſive evil in the preſent life.

Wo be to that *man*, or to that *community* of men, by whom offences come! Wo be to that *church*, which depraves the doctrines of the Goſpel, inſtead of building up its members in their moſt holy faith! Wo be to that *miniſter of the Goſpel*, whoſe life is a *ſcandal* to his ſacred function. Wo to that *chriſtian magiſtrate*, whoſe hands are ſlack, and whoſe ſword is ſo borne in vain, as to be no "terror to evil doers, no praiſe to them "that do well". And wo to us *all*, what-

ever be our office, poſt, or profeſſion, if we do not endeavour both to learn and to diſcharge the ſeveral duties of it, carefully and conſcientiouſly; to the glory of our Creator, and the ſervice of our fellow creatures.

Agreeably to this denunciation of our Lord, you may read in ſcripture a particular and choſen vengeance, that will one day be executed upon a certain wicked power, a *body of men*, defilers and perſecutors and ſcandalizers of the kingdom of God. The ſacred writings call it the *beaſt*, and the *little horn of the beaſt*; that is, a ſpiritual uſurpation ſpringing up by ſmall degrees till it ſubdues the very *civil powers*. They deſcribe the ten kingdoms (our own kingdoms of *Europe*, into which the Roman Empire was broken) as "giving their ſtrength unto this "beaſt"----ſubmitting to become the ſlaves and tools of this church-tyranny. But, ſays the prophet Daniel, "the judgment ſhall ſit, "and they ſhall take away his dominion, "and ſhall give his body to the burning "flames".

St John, in his revelation, has expatiated upon this chriſtian prophecy, and has collected

lected all the triumphs of judgment and divine wrath proclaimed againſt Babylon, and Egypt, and even Sodom herſelf, to be unitedly burſt upon the head of this Grand Apoſtate. And ſuch, in God's appointed time, will be the fall of Rome---of that impious Polity, which, through all quarters of the globe, has thus long perverted the Goſpel, and been ſuch "a monſtrous rock of offence "to the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church "of God";---which, in defiance of Chriſt's expreſs command, will not ſtay for *his* determined ſeaſon, nor ſuffer *Him* "to gather "the *tares* out of his kingdom", but profanely dares to "root up and deſtroy the "*good wheat* along with them"---calling for fire from heaven to conſume thouſands of the virtuous, the humble, and the faithful--intoxicated with lawleſs power, and "drun-"ken with the blood of the Saints, and of "the Martyrs of Jeſus".

Thus do the holy ſcriptures ſpeak of *offenders*, in a *public capacity*.

But let us all remember, that *each of us* is to undergo *his bitter ſhare* of puniſhment, in proportion to the guilt *he himſelf* has incurred

of *giving offence*--the guilt of not only his own *perſonal* ſins, but of "leading the blind out of "the way"---his friends his dependents, his *relations*, and his very *children*, out of the *way of ſalvation*. For the all-wiſe God cannot be deceived: the words of the Son of God ſhall aſſuredly be fulfilled--- "He ſhall "ſend his Angels, and ſhall gather out of "his kingdom all things that *offend*, and "them that commit iniquity; and ſhall caſt "them into the lake of fire"---where happy would it have been "for them, if a milſtone "had been hanged about their necks, and "they had been drowned in the depth of the "ſea; yea ſtill far happier, if they had never been born"!

SERMON XXIV.

HEBREWS ii. 3.

How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation, which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord?

AT the time when this epiſtle was written, the chriſtian religion was in a very low and perſecuted condition. And the hotteſt fire of the perſecution was blown up by that very people, and in that very country, where the firſt gracious offers of it had been made. So it often happens----that 'they 'who are obliged to the higheſt gratitude, 'turn the bittereſt enemies to their benefac-'tor'. The Jews that inhabited the Holy Land, were the firſt and principal adverſaries of this way of true holineſs. Theſe were commonly called *Hebrews*, to diſtinguiſh them

them from the *other Jews*, or *proſelytes*, who lived diſperſed about the ſeveral parts of the world, and were ſtiled *Grecians*. So you read, in the ſixth chapter of the Acts, of a murmuring betwixt the *Hebrews* and the *Grecians*; that is, between the natives of *Paleſtine*, and the *Stranger-Jews*.

With theſe Hebrews, St. Paul kept a continual correſpondence. And as he had *himſelf* converted many of them to the chriſtian faith, who now lay under a heavy weight of oppreſſion and malice from the far greater number of their infidel-brethren; and were in imminent hazard of relapſing from their good principles, by the ſtrong temptation of preſerving lives and liberties;----he thence takes occaſion of writing this diſcourſe to them *both*.

With the *unbelieving part*, he argues upon the excellency and importance of the *chriſtian* inſtitution, in preference to that of *Moſes*. With the *believers*, he makes uſe of all the powerful perſuaſives, that might raiſe their courage, and ſupport their hearts ready to droop under afflictions, and cauſe them to hold faſt their chriſtian profeſſion.

Amongſt

Amongſt theſe arguments are "the ſuper-"lative dignity of the perſon of Chriſt"; "the great and admirable things He has "taught us" "the wonders He has done and "ſuffered for us"; and, from all this, "the "certain puniſhment and perdition of thoſe "men, who either will not embrace, or al-"low themſelves to be drawn away from "the belief and practice of a religion, to "which ſuch ſignal privileges are annexed"!

The words I have read to you, include all the conſiderations abovementioned: And we are to obſerve in them,

I. The Goſpel, under the character of *ſalvation*;---as the *greateſt* ſalvation;---and peculiarly great above all others, in that it was delivered to us, and obtained for us, by the *Lord*.

II. What it is to *neglect* this ſalvation.

III. The ſure and inevitable ruin of ſuch, as *do* thus neglect it.

The concluſion of all will be, the unſpeakable abſurdity and diſingenuity, uſually diſcovered by ſinful men in this neglect.

I. The word *ſalvation* is commonly applied to ſome ſpecial and eminent *danger*, or to ſome *actual diſtreſs and calamity* under which a perſon or a people are ſuppoſed to

have laboured, and then to be delivered from them. And this ſenſe is fully completed, when it ſignifies, moreover, a *continuance* and *eſtabliſhment* of the ſafety and deſirable ſtate, into which a perſon is once brought.

The title of *Saviour*, or *Deliverer*, was always eſteemed the top character of honour, that could be conferred on any one. Thus the Heathens, when they imagined any of their Gods to have interpoſed for them in any of their battles, or in remarkable ſieges, and to have given them victory; were wont to grace them with the high appellation of *Saviours*. And Generals and Commanders, who reſcued any town, or ſaved a country, by ſucceſs of arms, were dignified with the ſame word---a word which has ſomething ſo ſublime in it, that, as Cicero obſerves, there was no phraſe in the whole latin tongue, that could come up to its greatneſs.

When the infinite and only true God is ſaid in ſcripture to be "the *Saviour* of all "men," and when the *Son of God* is deſcribed as "bringing *ſalvation*"; though the *language* be the ſame, the *ſenſe* muſt riſe abundantly higher than what can be raiſed in your mind by any *earthly* character. If you have

have any juſt apprehenſions of *ſpiritual* things; you will think of ſomething far above that low and *literal* acceptation; and will look at a bleſſing ſuperior to any *temporal* deliverance, or mere terreſtrial happineſs. Chriſt is not your Saviour, in the mean *jewiſh* notion. He delivers not his people by war, and bloodſhed; nor erects his kingdom upon the dreadful foundation of miſery and ſlaughter: He came not to conquer for you by an arm of fleſh; nor to preſent you with ſpoils of riches, or gaudy honours, or worldly preferments.

But if you will underſtand what it is to be ſaved from the worſt enemy, and the worſt evil, a rational and moral creature can be ſubject to;---what it is to be freed from the ſnares of vice, from the power of luſts, from the "bondage of corruption", that would *here at preſent* debaſe your natures, cramp and enſlave your beſt faculties and affections, and *hereafter* for ever chain you down to a painful and wretched Being; if you remember what it is to bind up the wounds, and cure the ſtings and vexations, of a guilty mind, to turn away the wrath of an offended Creator, and procure the pardon and favour

of

of an infinite judge;---or if you reflect what it is to be governed by the pureſt and moſt wholeſome laws, to be guided and aſſiſted by an all-wiſe and bleſſed ſpirit;----if you duly conſider *all this*, you will *then* perceive in what a happier and more exalted view *Jeſus* is the author of *your* ſalvation: for He "ſaves "you from your *ſins*". He did not become your advocate by venturing his life at the head of armies, but He lived to teach you the divine art of conquering *yourſelves*; and He died, to put *you* into a capacity of living for ever. To ſave *ſome* by the deſtruction of *more*, would have been a poor buſineſs! many a weak and wicked mortal has done the ſame! It is *his unparalleled* victory, that "by his "*own ſuffering*, He hath deſtroyed *Death* "*himſelf*, and by his Goſpel hath brought "life and immortality to light".

All theſe circumſtances cannot fail to ſhew you, that the Goſpel-ſalvation is truly *great*. But the *Perſon*, by whom it was ſpoken and conveyed to us, will ſtill magnify it beyond all greatneſs. "It was ſpoken by the *Lord*"---by that *Son of God*, deſcribed in the former chapter--Whom the Supreme Father "hath appointed Heir of all things", that is,

Lord

Lord and Ruler of the whole world--Whom He "hath made higher than the Angels", giving Him a more excellent name, nature, and character, than all of them---- "The "brightneſs of his Father's glory, and the "expreſs image of his perſon".

Lord of mercies! What a Perſon was *here* to come and be a Saviour to a race of low and degenerate creatures! What could move the Father of Heaven, to ſend ſuch a one to the ſons of the earth? Why, *this* it was:--to teſtify to the whole creation, what tenderneſs there is in heaven for the honour of its laws and government, and for the welfare and recovery of all rational creatures, the images of God;--to demonſtrate to the whole univerſe God's hatred of ſin, and his determination to puniſh it: only that nothing ſhall finally condemn a ſinful world, but incorrigible wickedneſs, and a neglect of divine ſalvation.

When you recollect this gracious errand of your Redeemer, you will feel the comfort of thoſe great words pronounced from heaven--- "to *you* is born this day a *Saviour*, "which is Chriſt the Lord".

II. The Second Point propoſed to be inquired

quired into was, "What it is to *neglect* this ſalvation".

To one who reads this epiſtle with any care, there will be little doubt that the *neglect*, againſt which the Apoſtle ſo earneſtly warned the Hebrews, was a neglect of the moſt pernicious and fatal kind, with reſpect both to the unreformed, and the converted part of them.

Of the *firſt* the neglect was, an obſtinate denial of the truth and obligation of Chriſt's religion; a wilful reſolution *not* to attend to its evidences, nor receive the laws of it.

Of the *ſecond* ſort the neglect lay in a want of courage to reſiſt the preſſures and temptations, which the adverſaries of their faith were throwing upon them;----a mean and criminal *temporizing*, contrary to the conviction of their own minds;----a renouncing their Saviour and their everlaſting ſalvation, for a little preſent advantage of peace and ſecurity.

This deſertion of their Maſter and his cauſe, the author of the epiſtle calls, "ſinning wilfully after they had received the "knowledge of the truth"---- "treading "under

"under foot the Son of God"---- "doing "deſpite to the ſpirit of grace"--- "falling "away, and forſaking the aſſembling of "themſelves together," &c.

But the *general* crime here mentioned, is far from being confined to thoſe times, or to thoſe perſons. It has a great many branches under it, that will concern the men, the *chriſtians*, of *all* times. For, in order to neglect and forfeit your ſalvation, it is by no means neceſſary to be at the bold expence of renouncing your baptiſm, and calling religon a cheat: it will ruin you as effectually, *not to practice* according to what you *believe*: and there is very little difference between *denying the truth* of the Goſpel, and *deſtroying the power* of it in your lives and actions.

It is a lamentable thing to ſay, that it is *our* lot to live in a chriſtian country, and in a reformed age; wherein, though we have none of the difficulties and hardſhips and prejudices, which theſe *Hebrews* laboured under; yet we have as numerous *vices*, as frequent and great *neglects*, as *they* can be ſuppoſed to have been guilty of.

Some of us are diſputing and cavilling and writing againſt their Saviour, and their own

ſalvation. Others ſeem perfectly indifferent, whether *his* or indeed *any* religion takes place, or no. And abundance, who *make profeſſion* of it, cannot be perſuaded to give it the leaſt *encouragement*, or to lend the leaſt helping hand to keep up its *credit* in the world.

And what has been the conſequence of all this negligence? A very obvious and natural one---that, while the true religion has had no regard paid to it, falſe and ſenſeleſs and wicked religion has been gaining ground amongſt us; * and begins to make the men, who have already loſt all *conſcience*, tremble for fear of loſing their *property* and *eſtates*--the ſure fate of thoſe who will not, by their example, ſupport the honour of their Maker's worſhip, nor beſtow the ſmalleſt countenance upon the ſervice of their Redeemer, for the *one only* ſolemn day ſtrictly required to be devoted to Him; no nor for ſo much as *an hour* of that day! Still leſs will they vouchſafe to join in the grateful *commemoration* of the *death* and *paſſion* of their Lord; unleſs it be to *qualify* themſelves, *not* for the ſuperior graces of heaven, *not* for the bread of eternal life,

* This alludes to the ſuppoſed increaſe of *Popery* in England, at the time this ſermon was written.

life, but for ſome "meat that will quickly "periſh", and be no more!

Again; many *acknowledge* the Goſpel; and, in *their way*, are *ſtrenuous* and *zealous* for it; but never take any pains to *examine what it is*. As if the Bible were written to exerciſe mens paſſions, not to improve their reaſon; or were given to be kept locked up in your cloſets, inſtead of being diligently ſtudied and underſtood.

But worſt, and moſt ſcandalous of all, is the *neglect* of that vaſt number, who *believe* and *talk* and *pretend*, and perform a great many *outward ſervices* in chriſtianity; and yet, in *common life*, act in ſuch a manner, and indulge ſuch humours, luſts and vanities, as if they verily thought that Chriſt came to ſave them *in* their ſins, not *from* their ſins; and as if *redeeming* did not ſignify redeeming them from *all iniquity*, but were to be a tranſlation of men from the purſuit of *ſome* vices here, to the fruition of *more* and *greater* hereafter.

Theſe are the ways by which *we* "ne- "glect our ſalvation", and "fail of the grace "of God". How ſevere a ſentence we muſt

expect for ſo doing, let us in the next place impartially conſider.

III. To them who believe the holy ſcriptures, the Apoſtle's argument is an undeniable one. "He that deſpiſed *Moſes his* law, "died without mercy". And again; "every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience" (of that *moſaic* law) "received a juſt recompence of "reward". Now, ſays St. Paul, "as Chriſt 'is ſuperior to Moſes, the *Son of God* to a 'mere *ſervant* in God's houſe; ſo much is 'his law and *his ſalvation* greater, higher, 'nobler. Conſequently the penalty for the 'contempt of it, is the more certain, and will 'be the more dreadful'.

As the method of our ſalvation in the Goſpel, is thus tranſcendently wiſe and excellent; it muſt, for that reaſon, be the *laſt*, that God can ever propoſe to the children of men. The pardon of ſin, and the promiſe of eternal life, are the whole of what God has to beſtow upon us, by way of compaſſion and bounty. The virtues and qualifications required to fit us for the heavenly ſtate, are, by their own nature, ſo adapted to that glorious end; ſo full of contentment and delight,

even

even in their *preſent* exerciſe;--that no other could poſſibly have anſwered the deſign of the ſupreme Lawgiver. And the life and death and example of the Saviour himſelf, are ſuch generous incitements to a conſcientious practice of the duties He has injoined us; that, after this, the goodneſs of heaven can find no more to do with man, but to redeem the obedient, or to vindicate the honour of its government upon the lawleſs and unfaithful.

And how can a wicked man hope to eſcape! *We* are but one ſmall world, among thouſands and numberleſs *other* worlds of rational creatures. Theſe are *all* ſubject to laws of reaſon and virtue, in proportion to their ſeveral natures, as well as ourſelves. They are witneſſes and obſervers of the divine government over the moral creation. They are admoniſhed, warned, and inſtructed by God's mercies, and his judgments. By ſeeing his rewards of obedience, they rejoice, and are encouraged in obedience; and by beholding his juſtice executed upon the *rebellious*, they are taught to fear ingenuouſly, and are edified in reverence, and true duty.

For God therefore to be remiſs, and regardleſs of puniſhment, would be to let fall the honour, and even the mercy, of his divine government. The example of it would relax the care, and quench the virtue, of the whole rational world, and ſpread vice and confuſion over the kingdom of God.

When our behaviour, then, has been thus kindly and wiſely put upon its trial; there can be no *new trial* without *puniſhment*: becauſe there are no *other* morals, or rules of conduct, proper for a man to be *tried by*. When the *laſt* and *beſt* means have been defeated, you may *hope*, if you pleaſe; but God is never to be mocked.

I will detain you no longer, than while I make a ſhort and general remark upon the inexcuſable imprudence and diſingenuity, uſually diſcovered by men (eſpecially by the men of *our own age and nation*) in this neglect of their grand and final intereſt.

When we look back upon the caſe of the primitive *Hebrew-Chriſtians*; what a hard leſſon of patience they had to learn; and what they underwent, to get through a life of perſecuted piety; I dare ſay we have all ſo much

much good nature, as to ſympathize with them. And were we to ſuppoſe ourſelves to have lived in *their* time, and to have been in *their* place; we could not eaſily ſay, what *we* ſhould have done, or how we ſhould have borne the trial. Such of them as fell from the faith, we could not but pity; ſuch as ſtood firm in it, we could not but admire.

What then ſhall we be able to plead, in *our own preſent caſe?* What apology can wit, or Charity herſelf, invent for us? *We* are likely to be deprived neither of life, nor lands, nor houſes, nor brethren, nor children, in the cauſe of Chriſt, or for the Goſpel of our ſalvation. What therefore is the bait, what the charm, that bewitches us to neglect it? Why we give up this "pearl of "ineſtimable price" for the ſake of a few worldly, ſenſual, bodily gratifications, that are common to us with the brutes; that, for the moſt part, will ſcarcely pay us for the pain, the pleaſure is mixed up with. Brutes eat and drink, and ſo do *we:* only *they* always do it, to a meaſure of natural ſufficiency; but *we*, very often, till we ſicken and repent by our folly.

Hardly can you name a vice for which you pawn your *future* ſalvation, but what is a *preſent* plague, to yourſelf, and all about you. Some of them waſte your bodies; others ſpoil your character: ſome of them end in *your own poverty*, or entail it upon your *families*; or perhaps drag the beſt of your *friends* after you, into a partnerſhip of your miſeries and wants. *All* of them without exception *deprave your minds*; and render you unfit both for public and private life.

For theſe unworthy objects and entertainments, you conſent to part with the virtues, to cultivate which Providence has bleſſed you with a ſtate of liberty and peace; which would allow you as many *true* pleaſures, as can be enjoyed in *one* world; and entitle you to thoſe that are far more refined, and more durable, in *another*.

To God only wiſe,---

SERMON

SERMON XXV.

PROVERBS iv. 26.

Ponder the path of thy feet; and let all thy ways be eſtabliſhed.

THE world, of which God is the ſupreme author and governor, is with great propriety divided into the *natural* and the *moral* world.

The natural world conſiſts either of *Material Bodies*, impreſſed with certain powers of motion, and other qualities; but deſtitute of all knowledge or conſciouſneſs of theſe qualities, and of all ability to alter or direct their motion: or elſe it conſiſts of *mere Animals*, endued with *ſenſe*, and certain *appetites*; and guided by that ſenſe, and following thoſe appetites, with an uniform impulſe which we commonly call *inſtinct*.

Thus

Thus the ſun and moon and all the heavenly bodies go their rounds; perform their wonderful periods; keep their conſtant orbits, never ſtarting or deviating from their appointed lines: yet know not in the leaſt what they are *doing*, or rather how and by whom they are *acted*. And therefore it is in a *figurative* meaning only, that the holy ſcripture ſays, they "*tell* or *declare* the glory of "God".

The *brute creatures* have, indeed, a kind of voluntary *action*; but are void of all *reflection* upon what paſſes within them. They march ſtraight forward; look very little, if at all, either backward or before them; think of no conſequences, no *moral difference* of action; have no other view, than gratifying the preſent inclination, whereby to preſerve *preſent life*; and entertain no fear or idea of *futurity*: from all which it clearly follows, that they are not properly *accountable* for any thing they do.

Man is a creature of quite another, and ſuperior mould. His mind is furniſhed not only with *ſenſation*, or mere *perception*, or a bare *capacity of acting*; but with a faculty of *reflecting* upon his actions; of ſeeing and comparing

comparing their natures and differences and various circumſtances; of looking both into the natural and moral fitneſs or unfitneſs of them; and gathering the *ſeveral events*, even the *diſtant conſequences*, of the one or the other, upon himſelf or other men.

Moreover; as this ſame power enables him to obſerve the fixed relations of things, and the neceſſary connection of *cauſes and effects*; he thence attains (or ought to attain) to the knowledge of the infinite Creator--the firſt cauſe of his own Being, and of all he beholds around him.

And thus he concludes himſelf to be a ſubject of the univerſal Governor, all-wiſe, good, juſt and powerful: He diſcerns and *feels*, that he is a branch of the *moral world*; that is, a creature who is obliged, by his very frame and conſtitution, to certain rules and laws of conduct, with regard to his Creator, his fellow creatures, and himſelf.

Laſtly; he finds, by perpetual experience, that ſuch rules of life and manners cannot be diſcovered, much leſs can they be *obeyed* and reduced to *practice*, without due attention and conſideration of mind.

This

This attention Solomon here, in an eaſy metaphor, ſets forth by the phraſe of "pon-"dering the path of our feet", or ſeriouſly examining what ſteps we are to take, what is the nature of our actions, and what are the laws by which we are to govern them.

This the wiſe man exhorts us to do, for the ſake of the deſireable and ſalutary *effect* it will have upon us---"ponder the path of "thy feet, and let all thy *ways be eſtabliſhed*". The marginal reading is much more expreſſive of the original word---"ſo all thy ways "*ſhall be* ordered aright": that is, 'if you 'make a prudent choice of the rule you are 'to act by, and weigh it well;---if you re-'flect as you ought upon the ſtation you are 'placed in, and upon the duties that belong 'to it;---*then* your principles *will* be ſolid, 'ſteady and ſecure; and your conduct *will of* 'course be rational, conſiſtent, diſcreet, and 'finally happy'.

The words of the text, you ſee, point out to us theſe ſeveral truths.

I. That there is an eſſential difference in human actions---a ſacred law of good and evil, which is of the utmoſt importance to be rightly underſtood by us.

II. That

II. That the knowledge of this law, and a firm conviction of its obligation, is to be a matter of our own free choice, and the result of our own care and meditation--"ponder the path of thy feet".

III. That after we *have* acquired a right notion of this rule; yet the habitual *observance* of it, and all the benefits that are to arise from such an observance, can only be obtained by frequently reviewing and correcting our behaviour, and often comparing it with the principles by which it ought to be regulated.

I. Then; here is a supposition of a plain and general maxim;---that "there is an in-"variable *moral* difference in the actions of "men; an indispensable rule of *right* and "*wrong*; which is of infinite concern to be "known and understood by us".

And notwithstanding this appears so universally evident from the very nature of mankind, as a reasonable and social creature; yet all open and profane wickedness, all wilful indulgence of vice and debauchery, is founded on a presumption that the quite contrary supposition is true. For though there are but

few

few men ſo abandoned, as *explicitly* to diſown all diſtinction of good and evil in *words*; yet the *practice* of every ſinful perſon proceeds from a *diſregard* of that diſtinction; and is the ſame in the *end*, as if he diſclaimed the diſtinction itſelf.

But you may poſſibly have heard of *ſome* creatures, whoſe evil habits have ſo totally perverted them, as to make them venture, in their own defence, upon *profeſſedly denying* and *arguing againſt* the ſtated laws that are to influence and protect the life of man;---upon affirming that 'virtue and *vice* are no-'thing more than *names* forged and deviſed 'by *ſome* to gain an aſcendancy over *others*, 'and to have the direction and management 'of them for political ends and purpoſes'.

It would be ſufficient to confute and ſilence theſe wretched men, if we could only perſuade them to look a little before them, and to ſee whither ſuch an opinion muſt lead them; or to look once behind them, and behold what it is that muſt overtake them.

Theſe people, we are to imagine, have a reaſoning faculty, as well as other men: they perceive what pleaſure and pain are: they

are

are a part of *ſociety*, and love *rights* and *property* and *peace* and *trade* and *proſperity*, in common with the reſt of their neighbours. But what ſad havock do they make of all theſe ſocial bleſſings, by the deſtructive doctrine they would advance! What is reaſon good for, or to what intent was it given us, but to inform us of the differences of things, and the tendency of our actions; and to order our converſation by the maxims of duty and diſcretion?

If ſome conduct be not in itſelf *laudable* and *amiable*, nor the oppoſite *diſgraceful* and *criminal*; the *brute-faculties* would have ſerved us well enough:----*rational* and *intellectual* endowments are beſtowed upon us in vain!

If there be not a native beauty and excellence, and an inherent turpitude and deformity, in mens doings; *ſenſe* and *mere inſtinct* would have been far more proper to carry on life, than *wiſdom* and *underſtanding*.

Again; witnout a *law*, a rule of public and private utility, what are kingdoms and governments and families and kindreds? What are communities and arts and commerce, and the welfare and tranquility of

neigh-

neighbourhoods? Why all of them, it ſeems, mere empty *names* and *words!* Nothing at all in the *things themſelves*; no duties, no mutual ties, no obligations, belonging to them!

Once more; if malice, fraud and violence, juſtice, truth and benevolence, be all of one origin, and of the ſame indifferent nature; men, no queſtion, will find out that they are ſo: and the inference from this diſcovery will be, that 'happy would it have been for 'the world, if God had never given us underſtanding enough to be deceivers and robbers and oppreſſors of each other. It was 'cruel in our Maker, to put a ſet of creatures '*ſo formed*, into ſociety together; and it 'would have been a mercy of providence, to 'have taught us no more than the beaſts of 'the field, and to have made us no wiſer than 'the fowls of heaven'.

Finally; there are not only theſe ſhocking and manifeſt abſurdities in denying the virtue and guilt, the morality and immorality, of human actions; but there is alſo the higheſt degree of diſhoneſty, and the moſt arrant impudence, in ſuch as do it.

For

For theſe ſame men, who would throw down all fences, and level all diſtinction between right and wrong, always take care to keep a *reſerve for themſelves*. When *their own* luſts are to be fulfilled, or *their own* barbarities exerciſed, or their own humours gratified, at the expence of the happineſs and enjoyments of *other* men;----all may paſs ſmooth and eaſy with them. But only turn the tables upon them: let but inſults and injuries and oppreſſion be laid upon *their own backs*: and who, ſooner than *they*, will cry aloud for priſons and juſtice and judgment? *Now* they can own and ſee and feel what truth and right are, and demand the rods and the axes and the gallows for all that break laws and commit iniquity!

No marvel therefore, that you find the holy ſcriptures denouncing the moſt ſolemn curſe upon men of this ſpirit; as the groſſeſt affronters of their God, and offenders againſt their own human nature! "Wo unto "them that call evil good, and good evil; "that put darkneſs for light, and light for "darkneſs; that put bitter for ſweet, and "ſweet for bitter"!

II. The ſecond thing, which the text directs us to remark, is;--- "that our know-"ledge of this *rule*, and a due ſenſe and ap-"prehenſion of this *law*, is to be matter of "our own free choice, and the reſult of our "own diligent and careful ſtudy"--- "pon-"der the path of thy feet".

For though all, that can juſtly be called *religion*, is intelligible to all men, and lies within the reach of every capacity; (for how elſe could the ſalvation of all men depend upon it?) though this, I ſay, be undoubtedly ſo;--yet the moſt obvious truths may be neglected and forgotten; and there are great errors and impoſitions to be incurred in the plaineſt things; and the plainer and more important ſuch matters are, the worſe, *very often*, are the corruptions that are introduced into them.

Thus, in the preſent caſe---the genuine rule of faith and morals, has abundant light and evidence: but ſtill it muſt be *remembered*, and *pondered*, and *attended to*; or we ſhall never be *eſtabliſhed in it*; we ſhall never be *clear* and *ſatisfied* and *ſettled* in our principles; but ſhall be liable to one of theſe two epidemical evils;

evils;---either to miſguide and delude ourſelves, or to be miſled and abuſed by other men.

They who think upon God, and his divine word and will, without a liberal and impartial mind, and a freedom from narrow prejudices of heart, uſually form to themſelves a ſtrait-laced and troubleſome ſcheme of piety. By having falſe notions of their *rule*, it becomes a burden and a vexation to them. They act with diffidence, and ſlaviſh fear: they place conſcience in things of little concern; and are often as full of penſiveneſs and anxious ſcruples about trifles and externals, as if they were the "weightieſt matters of "the law". This wrong turn of ſentiment, is the frequent ſource of an immoderate and fiery zeal, that is as hateful and miſchievous to others, as it is plagueful to the man himſelf.

Such is the nature of *ſuperſtition*; which ſo often uſurps the hallowed name of *religion*:----a principal originally derived from ignorance and error; nouriſhed and bred up by fancy, and a warm imagination; brought to a dreadful maturity by ſtrong and ill-go-

verned paſſions; and ſometimes terminating in as much evil and confuſion to the cauſe of the Goſpel, as infidelity, or Atheiſm itſelf, can poſſibly do.

But farther; without the exerciſe of our *reaſon*, and a deliberate and judicious choice of our religious opinions, we ſhall be in the *other* ſad inſtance of danger----that of being *ſeduced*, and becoming a prey to others. For ſo it almoſt always happens----that *they*, who employ no pains or conſcience in chooſing religion for *themſelves*, have it dreſt and cooked up for them by *other* men. And the effects of *this* are terrible indeed! Since the people, who would bind their own creed upon their neighbours *hearts*, generally take care firſt to tie their *hands*, and to blind their *eyes*: and then every ſtep they ſet without their leaders, is at their own peril. And thus it has often come to paſs, for want of tolerable conſideration, and a very eaſy degree of reflection (a degree of reflection, which all men may be maſters of) that the true religion, like the bleſſed author of it, has been firſt ſcandalized, and afterwards crucified between two thieves. Prieſtcraft, on the one

ſide,

ſide, has made it odious; and ſuperſtition, on the other, has rendered it ridiculous!

But then this effect has ariſen from the folly and ill diſpoſition of them that *take* this offence, as the firſt occaſion of it was the weakneſs and wickedneſs of thoſe that *gave* it. For let there be a thouſand errors, and ten thouſand villainies; ſtill, I hope, there is ſuch a thing as truth and honeſty. Each of you has his duties, and obligations, and rules of life, to walk by; though never ſo many *men*, though never ſo many *ages of men*, have endeavoured to darken and corrupt them. And if you have any the leaſt notion, or ambition, of acting up to the dignity and character of a *man*; you will never ſhake off theſe ſacred bonds of humanity, becauſe enthuſiaſts have been mad, and Prieſts have been knaves.

" *Ponder* therefore theſe paths", and view theſe ſober plain principles, of the " *love of* " *God and your neighbour*" of " *temperance*, " *godlineſs*, *mercy*, and *charity*". *They* have nothing in them ſevere, intricate, myſterious, or moroſe: they were never invented by politicians, nor coined by prieſts: they lie open

to the examination of your own common ſenſe, and daily experience: they are recommended to you by no traffickers in divinity, but by Chriſt himſelf, and God, and Nature. And it is of *theſe* you are promiſed, that if you will embrace them, and faithfully think upon them, and practiſe them; they will "eſ-"tabliſh your ways"---will give you all the comfort and contentment you can enjoy in the preſent life, and "lay up for you a good "foundation againſt the time to come".

SERMON

SERMON XXVI.

PROVERBS iv. 26.

Ponder the path of thy feet; and let all thy ways be eſtabliſhed. *

IN diſcourſing upon theſe words, I purpoſed to treat on the great duty of religious and ſerious *conſideration*; and have obſerved to you,

Firſt, a ſuppoſition of an evident truth, as the *ground* of this conſideration; viz. "that "there is an eſſential difference in the ac- "tions of men, both as to their *moral quali-* "*ties*, and their *natural conſequences*;----that "there is a certain rule, an eternal *law* of "*good* and *evil*; the obſervance of which is "of infinite concern and importance to us". And this I have endeavoured to prove, as well from the reaſon of the thing, as from the flagrant abſurdities of the contrary ſuppoſition.

 Secondly,

* Or, ſo all thy ways *ſhall be* ordered aright, as it is better rendered in the margin.

Secondly, I remarked to you, "that a "*right ſenſe* and *knowledge* of this rule, can- "not poſſibly be attained by any other "means, than as a matter of our own free "choice, and careful inquiry".

The remaining part of my ſubject is, to ſpeak of this duty, with an immediate view to the *practical life*;---wherein I am to ſhew you, "that however clearly we may *under-* "*ſtand* this rule, yet we cannot reduce it "to *action*, nor bring it to a virtuous and "happy effect, without frequently reviſing "and correcting our conduct, and comparing "it with the *principles* by which it ought to "be governed": or, in the words of the text, "our ways muſt be *pondered*, in order "to their being *eſtabliſhed*".

III. To convince you of this grand point, let us divide the whole life of man into the only *three* articles, of which it can conſiſt. Either, 1, his *paſt* actions. Or, 2, his *preſent* ones. Or, 3, his *future* behaviour.

1. Then I ſay, that he who wiſhes to be an *amiable* or a *valuable* man, muſt have a continual regard to the condition and tranſactions of his *former life*.

Whoever

Whoever looks into human nature under its preſent circumſtances, will ſee great occaſion not only for men of the more defective characters, but even for thoſe of better conſcience, to caſt an eye back, and to ſee what they have been doing. The very beſt of us all have performed our work of life ſo imperfectly; have left ſo many *blanks* to fill up, ſo many *flaws* to amend, nay doubtleſs ſo many *ſins* to anſwer for; that it may be but a modeſt part in us, to apply to ourſelves the words of the Pſalmiſt; "who can "tell how oft he offendeth! And if we expect to arrive at any improvement and perfection, we muſt follow his *method* too: "I "thought upon my ways, and turned my "feet unto thy teſtimonies"; that is, 'I 'corrected my error, by *recollecting* what it 'was, and where *the fault lay*'.

Things that are *paſt*, are very liable to be forgotten, and to be conſidered as *out of being*. But *ſinful actions* muſt not be *ſo* treated. Unleſs you often call *them* before you, and review the guilt and evil of them, and get a diſtaſte to them; they will leave a taint upon your mind; and their reliſh will grow in you, and become agreeable to you.

Without

Without repentance for what is *paſt*, all good diſpoſitions will be in infinite danger of looſing ſtrength and decaying for the *future*. Now *repentance* is ever the reſult of *thought* and *reflection*: and ſo the holy ſcriptures always repreſent it.

When the prophet Ezekiel was commanded to warn the Iſraelites of the peril they were in, through their *paſt* ill behaviour; it was with this proſpect--- "it may be they "will *conſider*", and repent. And the prophet Jeremiah gives this reaſon, why that nation perſiſted in their obſtinacy and diſobedience: "I hearkened and heard", ſays God; that is, I deſired, and patiently waited for, their converſion; "but *they* ſpake not "aright; no man repented him of his wick-"edneſs, ſaying, *what have I done*."!

Some chriſtians, nay ſome chriſtian *writers*, have been ſo exceedingly weak, as to aſcribe all *repentance* to the *Divine Spirit*, in ſuch a manner, as would ſhew it to be no duty at all of *man*, becauſe *wholy impoſſible to man*, and altogether the work of *God*. And *then*, indeed, it may be done at any time. And a drooping old age, after a life of debauched youth; or a death-bed ſickneſs with an evil con-

conſcience;----may afford ſufficient ſpace to work the good work of reformation in the heart and manners of the offender. For if God does but ſay the word, the thing is effected, and the man is converted. But the ſcriptures ſpeak quite otherwiſe, and far more agreeably to reaſon and nature and experience. And even ſome learned *Heathen moraliſts* come much nearer to the ſenſe of the prophet's doctrine, than ſuch deluded chriſtians.

Pythagoras, in the famous precepts to his diſciples in the *golden verſes*, tells them, "it "would mightily conduce towards leading "them into the paths of religious virtue, to "examine themſelves every night before they "went to ſleep, what good they had done, what duty they had omitted?

And Seneca has recorded, in terms of high reſpect, a philoſopher named Sextius, who always did the ſame; and whoſe laſt words, in the concluſion of every day, were ſuch as theſe--- "How have I been employed to "day? Am I as free from guilt, am I a "better, or am I not a worſe man, than I was "yeſterday"? And (though I cannot at preſent

preſent call to mind the *name*) I have read of ſome great Maſter, who, by his own *example*, encouraged his ſcholars to keep a *book of notes* of their failures, neglects, and tranſgreſſions.

I am entirely ſenſible, what reception ſuch kind of advice would meet with at this time of day, among our *modern chriſtians*---and yet we muſt not be ſo *uncomplaiſant*, as to rank them below the *Heathens*. But I ſhall take the liberty to declare, that though I would by no means, contrary to their wills, confine them to a *book*, I could heartily wiſh they would make a book of their *own minds* and *memories*, and regiſter a few of their tranſactions there! It would be of unſpeakable advantage to them, by rendering them no leſs *gentlemen*, and much better *chriſtians!*

Certainly, for want of ſome method like this, the generality of men are juſt as able to give an account of *life*, as a man that rides *poſt* through a *country*, is fit to write a *natural hiſtory* of it.

Nor would I exactly preſcribe to them, how *often* they ſhould *look over* theſe memorandums: but I may ſafely aſſert, that the

oftner

oftner they did it, the greater benefit they would receive. A man's *ſpiritual* concerns, and the affairs of his *conſcience*, pretty nearly reſemble thoſe of his *trade*, or his *eſtate*:--- 'the longer he lets them run without ſearch-'ing into them, the more confuſed and in-'tricate they will be; till at laſt it may be 'almoſt impoſſible to ſet them right'! You can never keep your heart ſo pure and ſo eaſy, as when you are frequently reckoning with it, and ſeeing how it ſtands.

And thus much of our *paſt* behaviour: let us now,

2, Try the caſe, as it relates to man's *preſent* actions and deſigns. Solomon has a ſage lecture of advice, very ſimilar to this in the text: "Whatſoever thy hand findeth to do, "do it with thy might". And the wiſe Son of Sirach: "Whatſoever thou takeſt in hand, "remember the end; and thou ſhalt never "do amiſs". "*Whatſoever* thy hand findeth "to do"---not *any action*, taken up *at ran-"dom*; but ſuch a conduct, as you have *well choſen*, and upon mature conſideration. "Do "it with thy *might*"---not in a *heat*, and a *hurry*; but with proper *diligence*, and with-

out

out needleſs *delay*. And *then*, when you have thus duly weighed the nature, end, and good purpoſes of it; "thou ſhalt never do "amiſs"---*not* that you ſhall never commit any *ſingle miſtake*, or indiſcretion, throughout life; but you ſhall fall into the *feweſt errors*, this frail Being of ours is capable of.

St. Paul in his firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians, gives a leſſon of exhortation to chriſtians, of exactly the ſame import: "Whe-"ther ye eat or drink, or *whatſoever* ye do; "do *all* to the *glory of God*". It would betray groſs ignorance, and want of judgment, to interpret an expreſſion of this ſort, into a ſuperſtitious anxiety, and a burthenſome preciſeneſs, in every trifling occurrence. The Apoſtle's words refer to ſuch actions, whereby ſome *good* or *evil* may be done, to ourſelves, or others. In caſes directly moral, the glory of God, that is, the credit and intereſt of his *religion*, the welfare of his *kingdom* whereof every man is a member, is *immediately* concerned. And even in the common and indifferent actions of life, *virtue* and *vice* are not totally excluded: ſome *general view*, ſome *conſideration* of them, is to be

be had, in every thing we do. Our very employments, and daily buſineſs, may run out into immoderate *care*; into *covetouſneſs*; into *fraud*, and *injuſtice*; unleſs an habit of thought, and good conſcience, keep them within the limits of true induſtry, honeſty, inoffenſiveneſs, and charity. Our very ſports and diverſions and recreations may terminate in folly, idleneſs, and a waſte of precious time; unleſs prudence and caution come in, and give them the bounds of innocence, and a right intention; making them to contribute to the health of the body, without ſpoiling the temper and gravity of the mind. Finally; every pleaſure a man can purſue, calls perpetually upon him to beware that reaſon and virtue be no ſufferers by it. Man was created to go through a ſet of actions, that contain in them the nature of *duty*; and abundance of *offices* and *relations* compoſe the whole of human life. Himſelf, his children, his friends, his neighbours, his country; the high and low, the rich and poor;----all put in their claim to ſome ſervice from his good conduct. While at the ſame time objects, in various ſhapes, are ſoliciting him to give himſelf

himſelf up to *another way*; and, by a thouſand baits and perſuaſives, are luring his mind from its proper work, to that which is vain and of no profit. All this taſk therefore can ſcarce poſſibly be performed, nor all theſe enticements avoided or withſtood, but by that habitual regard to the great law of morals, of which I am ſpeaking;--that conſideration of the nature, circumſtances, and tendency of our actions, which ought to run uniformly through all the parts of life.

3. The neceſſity of this attention to ourſelves, and to the rule of our duty, will farther appear in the laſt claſs of human actions; namely, a man's *future* behaviour; as the *fruit* of good notions and reſolutions, previouſly cultivated and fixed in the mind.

When the holy ſcriptures warn us to be "ſober and vigilant"; to "watch and pray, "that we enter not into temptation";--when our bleſſed Lord gives it ſo ſtrictly in charge to his own diſciples, to "take heed to themſelves, leſt their hearts be overcharged with "ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and cares of "this world";---in theſe, I ſay, and all the like admonitions, a due and moſt providential

reſpect

reſpect is paid to the temper of our minds, and the ſtate we are placed in.

If you either ſurvey your own ſpirits, or judge from what generally paſſes in the world around you; it will be manifeſt, that, without continual care and thought, the wiſeſt man cannot certainly conclude to day, what he ſhall be to-morrow.

It may ſeem ſtrange at firſt ſight, but experience puts it beyond doubt, that a right courſe of *action* is not always the conſequence of a *right judgment in the underſtanding*. Truth is often a very clear thing; but a bare *conviction* of it, a mere *faith* and *aſſent* of the mind, are frequently found without the effects of a ſuitable *practice*; though, indeed, they are the beſt means to it, and the beſt preparatives for it.

"To do the thing you cannot inwardly "approve; and to lead the life, *in many par-* "*ticulars*, which your conſcience tells you is "wrong";——is the reproach, we are daily caſting upon each other. It is an infinite pity it *ſhould* be ſo! But our preſent buſineſs is, to inquire *why* it is ſo; what is wanting to produce real and actual virtue, where there is already a good underſtanding. In few

words then, the ſole Requiſite is this frequent *reflection*, this repeated *conſideration* of the importance and neceſſity of *conforming to* the principles we *believe* and *underſtand:* without which, the bare *ſight* and *idea* of them will enter into the mind, and glide out of it again, like an empty viſion, or a dream!

The author of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews conſulted human nature perfectly well, when he cautions us to "give *earneſt heed* to the "things that we have heard, leſt at any time "we *let them ſlip*". And St. Peter, though he wrote to men that were thoroughly acquainted with their duty, yet, ſays he, "I "will not be negligent to put you in *remem-* "*brance* of theſe things, though ye *know* "them".

Reaſon and the word of God will everlaſtingly paſs ſentence for every virtue, and againſt every vice: but it is *attention* to that reaſon, and an *habitual veneration* for *that* divine word, which alone can rouze the heart to action, give a check to the violence of your paſſions, and ſet you above the power of temptations and bad examples. So ſays the philoſopher Seneca, juſt now mentioned: "There is greater labour in *maintaining* a

"good

"good principle, than in the *firſt framing* it; "and it is by no means ſo difficult to *attain to* "knowledge, as to proceed to *practiſe* upon "it. There muſt therefore", adds that grave moraliſt, "be a continual *application of thought* "to what you have *learned*, and *reſolved up-* "*on*: for this is the only way to turn that "into an *habit of the will*, which at firſt is "but a mere *ſentiment* and *notion* of the *un-* "*derſtanding*".

The reſult of what has been ſaid upon the whole ſubject, would be of ſignal uſe, if properly regarded, to chriſtians of all orders and denominations.

It will be ſerviceable even to the moſt upright perſons. It will awaken them to higher degrees of induſtry and watchfulneſs; prevent their being at a ſtand in their endeavours; preſs them forward to the mark of their high calling; and cauſe them not only to continue in grace, but to grow in it.

Let no idle and profligate creature call it a *burden* and a *ſlavery*, "to think about him- "ſelf and his actions, and to recollect the "errors of his life". *Conſideration* is the natural exerciſe of a rational mind: it is what you

were made for, and fitted for: it is your moſt important *employment*; and a little ſerious pains will occaſion it to become your ſublimeſt *pleaſure*.

And though indeed, at the *beginning*, it may be no pleaſing ſight to behold your own deformity; and there can be but little delight in dwelling upon your own miſconduct; and you may be ready to cry out to your repenting and guilty thoughts, as the evil ſpirits did to to our bleſſed Saviour, "why are you come to torment me before "the time";----yet have but patience; do but ſtand the operation once and again; and you will feel the pain abate every day; every freſh trial will lighten your burden; and next to the joy of not running at all into fooliſh errors, it is one of the moſt generous and exalted comforts in the world, to ſee and to correct them!

In all *temporal engagements*, and in every inſtance of *common life*, it is univerſally agreed, that there is not ſo low and ſo little a character, as that of an *unthinking* man. And why ſhould it not be much more truly eſteemed ſo, in the buſineſs of the *moral* life?

Since

Since all our characters and connections *here*, will quickly be at an end: but the conſequences of our *good or evil actions*, will follow us beyond the grave; will remain with us, and cleave cloſe to us, as long as exiſtence itſelf ſhall laſt!

The concluding part of my application ſhall be addreſſed to *young* perſons. *You* are now in the entrance upon your journey through life: and your ſucceſs will very much depend upon the track you ſet out in. Be particularly cautious of the firſt ſteps you take: for when you have once choſen a falſe road, *Youth* will be too apt to hurry you forward in it: and then the faſter you go, the ſooner will you arrive at deſtruction; and the harder will you find it to recover yourſelf into that way, which leadeth to everlaſting life. "Ponder therefore the path of thy feet; that "ſo all thy ways may be ordered aright".

SERMON XXVII.

JOB. vii. 20.

I have ſinned: what ſhall I do unto thee, O thou preſerver of men!

WHILE Job lay under the chaſtiſing hand of God, there was a long conference between him and his friends, about the *cauſe* and *occaſion* of his calamities; and how to account for the juſtice and goodneſs of the Divine Providence that inflicted them.

Job's friends, from the narrow and imperfect notions they entertained of the divine government, inferred (and ſtrongly inſiſted upon it) that he muſt have committed ſome ſignal and malignant wickedneſs;—ſuppoſing it utterly inconſiſtent with the attributes of an

all-wiſe and righteous Being, to afflict a tolerably *innocent* perſon, with any remarkable degree even of *temporal* evil.

But the good man, conſcious of his own integrity as to any *ſcandalous* and *frequent* enormities, vindicates himſelf, and confutes *their* arguments. However in his replies to the charge brought againſt him, Job is far from claiming to himſelf an abſolute and faultleſs purity. A ſinner (as *all* men more or leſs are) he acknowledged himſelf to be: ſome *ſingle* and *particular* deviations from the divine Law, he muſt needs be imagined to have been guilty of. And, even in *that* light, he humbly conſidered himſelf as obnoxious to the diſpleaſure of the great Creator, and thought that *not all his ſevereſt repentance* could ever make a full and adequate recompence for *any one* ſin againſt the Infinite Majeſty above!

Tranſgreſſion againſt a *neighbour*, or againſt *any human* authority merely as ſuch, may admit of complete ſatisfaction to be made: becauſe *here* we have to deal with thoſe that are our *equals*, in nature, and in the general circumſtances of life. But with reſpect to *God*, the

the *Supreme Lawgiver*, Job rightly ſtates the queſtion---- "I have ſinned: what ſhall I do "unto *Thee*, O thou *Preſerver*"---it ſhould be tranſlated, O Thou *Creator*, of mankind--- or, as the Septuagint renders it, "O Thou "that *knoweſt the hearts* of men"!

The text, you ſee, is ſpoken by way of *compariſon*; and means to expreſs, "how pe- "culiarly criminal and dangerous all wick- "edneſs is, conſidered as a breach of the *di- "vine* laws, *beyond what it is*, as committed "againſt the laws of *man*, or thoſe of any "*other* legiſlature you can conceive".

In this ſenſe therefore I purpoſe to take it; and, the better to juſtify the doctrine contained in it, I will,

I. Inquire into the nature of vicious actions *in general*, and ſhew you wherein the evil of them lies.

II. I ſhall from thence deduce the truth of this *particular propoſition*.

And, III. conclude in ſuch a manner, as may be uſeful to your practical and chriſtian life.

I. When Almighty God created the world, He implanted in the ſundry creatures of

which

which it conſiſts, ſuch powers and properties, as were ſuited to the frame and conſtitution of each; and that might fit them to *act*, or to be *acted upon*, agreeably to the wiſe intent and ſcheme of their exiſtence.

Theſe properties or qualities of things, and the conſtant operation of them, we call their *laws*, and their *obſerving* and *following* the *laws of their nature*. So the *ſun*, and the *ſtars*, keep their regular motions, aſpects, and periods; according to the diſtances appointed them, and the forces and directions impreſt upon them. So the plant grows, the ſea ebbs and flows, and every thing *upon earth* goes forward in the order, and for the ends and uſes deſigned in the *natural* world.

If any Power ſhould aboliſh theſe eſſential qualities, or obſtruct their operation; we ſhould ſay that "the *nature* of ſuch things "was altered, ſuſpended, or deſtroyed".

It is exactly the ſame, in the *moral* world. When God gave us Being; and placed us *here*; He breathed into us *living ſouls*, with faculties of *underſtanding*, *reaſoning reflecting*, *chooſing*; to qualify us to live by the rules of the *rational* and *ſocial* life; under a ſenſe of

Him,

Him our Maker and Diſpoſer; for *his* glory, *our own* happineſs, and the comfort of *each other*; and that, by ſuch a faithful diſcharge of our ſeveral duties, we might obtain his *farther* favour in a *future* and *ſuperior* ſtate.

Our internal *feeling* and *conſciouſneſs* of theſe faculties, and of the great and beneficial ends for which they were beſtowed on us, demonſtrates our *obligation*, and the *law* we are under, to *purſue* and *fulfill* thoſe ends. And this I take to be the proper idea of *virtue*, or *religion*.

What then is *vice*, or a *ſinful action*, but a tranſgreſſion of theſe boundaries of reaſon and providence; a contradicting and ſubverting all the wiſe methods propoſed for our good by the bountiful author of nature, and of the creation?

And though *injuſtice* and *oppreſſion*, have an *immediate* relation to *ſociety*, and are principally deſtructive of it;—and though *intemperance* and *debauchery* work their *firſt* miſchief upon a *man's ſelf*, upon the health of his body, upon his morals and reputation and worldly affairs; though theſe crimes, I ſay, are *directly levelled* againſt your *neighbour* and *yourſelves*; yet the *guilt* and *evil* of them are

very

very far from *terminating here*: they reach, with ſtill greater malignity, up to *Heaven itſelf*; as a contempt of *His* unbounded authority, of *His* ſacred will and ordinances, who is the God of the univerſe, the Original of all order, truth and rectitude, the Fountain of all perfection and happineſs.

II. This leads me to the proof of the main propoſition, pointed out to us in the text; namely, "how peculiarly hainous in themſelves, and dreadful in their conſequences, "are all wicked actions, conſidered as a "breach of the *divine* commands, *beyond what* "*they are*, as committed againſt a mere *human* government, or any *other* power whatſoever".

In the *general*, this is exceedingly apparent, from the contents of the foregoing head. The tranſcendent and inexpreſſible excellence of the *divine* nature above that of *man*, and of every other Being, is the ſtrongeſt demonſtration of it. But it will not be amiſs, I hope, to ſhew it diſtinctly, in the ſeveral *particulars* of the compariſon.

And, 1, "let a ſinful man turn his thoughts "upon the *Perſon* that is offended in every "immoral action".

If

If you ſin againſt *yourſelf*, and feel the painful effects of immoderate luſt and licentiouſneſs; though, when you come to *reflect*, you cannot forbear accuſing and condemning yourſelf;----yet there is a principle of falſe ſelf-love, or a new temptation to the ſame vicious pleaſure, that will help you to forget your pain, or inure you to bear it.

Or if you treſpaſs againſt your neighbour, your ſuperior, your prince, or your country; in all theſe caſes, you have to do with ſuch as are of the ſame common ſpecies, and in the ſame common rank of Being, with yourſelf. The juriſdiction *they* exerciſe, is but a *delegated* one: they are but *men*; and ſurpaſs you in merely external and tranſitory circumſtances. But what will you ſay to the *Creator* of men! *There* the diſtance between you is infinite; the authority you affront, is original, eternal, and unlimited!

Moreover; the decrees and injunctions of earthly governors, are ſometimes very imperfect; their wills and tempers arbitrary, fickle, and fantaſtical: ſo that a man may be much more unhappy than culpable, in diſobeying them; and what he ſuffers for it, may call

for

for a conſiderable degree of pity from every tender breaſt. But the Heavenly Governor is without all exception. *His* precepts are the laws of nature, and are modelled by the amiable and everlaſting ſtandard of righteouſneſs and equity. It may therefore be highly criminal, to ſin againſt *man*: but the higheſt poſſible *ingratitude* fills up the meaſure of our offences againſt the author of our exiſtence, and of all the bleſſings we *have*, or hope for, or can enjoy!

2. And this will ſhew you (as a farther aggravation of the caſe) "the utter *inexcuſe-*
"*ableneſs* of all *deliberate* and *repeated* viola-
"tion of the *divine laws*": for it is of ſuch *habitual* wickedneſs, that I would be underſtood *principally* to ſpeak, in the preſent diſcourſe.

The world about us, is a confuſed and intricate ſcene of things; full of various and promiſcuous turns of good and evil. So that ill *fortune*, or ill *treatment*, may often urge us to claſh with each other; and not to be ſo nicely careful as we ought to be, about the exact limits of right and wrong. Add to this, that the rules and orders of many ſocieties

cieties are ambigious and obſcure; afford different handles; are liable to different interpretations; or perhaps bear hard upon *particular perſons*:----whence room is left for numberleſs pleas and ſophiſtries, to evade the penalties for the breach of them. Whereas whatever is a dictate of *conſcience*, and the voice of God within you, carries in it ſuch reaſons to recommend, ſuch powerful engagements to enforce the practice of it, as cut off all pretenſions to any apology. The leſſons of *duty to your Maker* are written in characters ſo legible, that "he that runs may read them": and the vices that endanger your ſalvation, are like open rocks in the ſea: nothing but wilful blindneſs, can poſſibly prevent your ſeeing and ſhunning them!

3. And if a preſumptuous offender againſt the Lord and Father of mankind, be thus deſtitute of all *excuſe*; "what ſhall he do, in "point of *atonement*? By what method "ſhall he *reconcile* this bleſſed and only Po-"tentate"?

When an injury is done to our *fellow-creature*, it may indeed be very grievous, and highly provoking. Yet how many ways are

there

there to ſalve the matter, and to make all whole again! A neighbour may ſtep in, and reſtore the peace: a friend may interpoſe, and heal the wound with a kind and hearty word: or elſe *intereſt* and *money* have a virtue, that can charm away the fierceſt reſentment, and cool the hotteſt blood. But here it is that *Job's queſtion* takes full place, and throws us into inextricable difficulties! What will the tranſgreſſor offer, to ſatisfy the *Maker of Souls?* Or where is the amends, to be made to Sovereign Eminence and Greatneſs? All that the *ſinner has*, all that the *whole world contains*, is God's already; and you can pay *Him* nothing, but what was his own before! The only thing that bears the leaſt *face* of *ſatisfaction*, is *repentance*. And *Reaſon* indeed aſſures us, that it muſt be good to *repent*; and that unfeigned contrition, joined to real amendment of life, will move the compaſſion of a wiſe and benevolent Governor. But even repentance itſelf, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is no abſolute *expiation* for the treſpaſs committed: it is only doing that very duty for the *future*, which ought *always* and *uniformly* to have been done: it cannot poſſibly *revoke* what is

actually

actually paſt: the old debt is ſtill ſubſiſting; and to cancel *that* perfectly, can be nothing leſs, than an act of free grace, and divine mercy.

4. To cloſe this compariſon---Let an unreclaimed ſinner aſk himſelf, "What he ſhall "do to his Maker, with reſpect either to the "*degree* of *puniſhment* due to his crimes, or to "the *certainty* of that puniſhment".

Wherever the laws of any community are broken, the nature and neceſſity of all government demand that a ſuitable penalty be inflicted. Can it then be otherwiſe, in the *divine* government of the *whole world*? No! but there is this terrible *difference*---that the utmoſt rigor of *human* magiſtracy can extend no farther than to your *bodies*, your preſent circumſtances, and your life; which is but ſhort at beſt. And when that is taken off, by a ſpeedy and ſcandalous *execution*; the *law* is ſatisfied, and the ſhameful *memory* of it may perhaps, in time, be buried in ſilence and forgetfulneſs. But the *judgment of God* will not be ſo ſoon over. As you are the *work of His hand*, you have in you a ſpring of perpetual duration. So that, when your unbridled wickedneſſes have brought you to

an ignominious *Grave*, they are not to part with you *there*, but are to follow you to *another tribunal*: and when you ſhall be far romoved both from the cenſures and the praiſes of *men*, you will ſtill be in the hands of that *Living God*, "into which it muſt be "a fearful thing for a rebellious creature to "fall"!

Again; what compariſon is there between the *certainty* of *human*, and that of *divine* puniſhment? Let a man's offence be never ſo flagrant, *his* cauſe never ſo hopeleſs, in an *earthly* court of judicature; the *penalty* is not always *ſure* to fall upon him. Some artful *advocate* may be found, to ſtand up, and plead for him----to give the affair an unexpected turn, and make right and wrong change places! And, even after ſentence is paſt, an *eſcape* may not be impoſſible.

But now, put to yourſelf the *laſt* and *finiſhing* queſtion--- "what is to be done with the "omniſcient and omnipreſent Judge of all "the earth"? *His* wiſdom is not to be impoſed upon by ſmall arts of rhetoric, or ſubtleties of perſuaſion: *His* juſtice can be eluded by no quirks of law, nor evaſive ingenuities: and were you ſuppoſed to have the tongues of Angels and of Archangels to

ſpeech it in your behalf; their words would have no weight!

So that whenever an unrepenting ſinner is caſt at that *celeſtial bar*, where juſtice, mercy, and wiſdom are all met together; he is left in the condition ſo beautifully but dreadfully painted by the holy Pſalmiſt: "Whither "ſhall he go from God's Spirit, or whither "can he flee from His preſence? Could he "climb up to Heaven, God is *there*: could "he ſink down into the unfathomed Abyſs, "even *there alſo* His arm would reach him, "and His right hand would hold him"!

III. Well then; what are the *practical inferences*, we are to draw from the foregoing doctrine? Why,

1. "You cannot but remark, with joy, "the compaſſionate deſign of the *Religion of* "*Chriſt*; which offers an unmerited and uni-"verſal pardon to the ſins of mankind, upon the kindeſt and eaſieſt terms".

While Job, you find, was contemplating himſelf as an offender againſt his ſupreme Benefactor, though it were but in ſome *few inſtances*, not by a *long ſeries* of riot and extravagance; how troubled and diſtracted were his thoughts--"What ſhall I do unto Thee,

"O thou Preſerver of men"! But, upon a farther proſpect---upon new light and comfort given of God to his devout and penitent ſoul----with what rapture does he break forth! "I know", ſays he, "that my *Re-*
"*deemer* liveth, and that He ſhall ſtand at "the latter day upon the earth". This is *our* Bleſſed Redeemer, that "Lamb of God, "who hath taken away the ſins of the "world"---who has ſolved all our doubts, and diſpelled all our fears; and has let it no longer remain an anxious query, "How the "ſinner ſhall appeaſe the Maker of man-"kind", or "who ſhall intercede for him", or, "what he ſhall do to be ſaved"? I beſeech you, hear the gracious conditions, and thankfully accept them, and religiouſly fulfill them! "Repent, and be converted eve-"ry one of you; that your ſins may be blot-"ted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall "come from the preſence of the Lord"

2. Finally therefore; you cannot help being convinced, from all that has been ſaid, "what accumulated guilt there lies upon the "unreformed vices of a *chriſtian*, above thoſe "of any *other* perſon".

St.

St. Paul, you know, affirms, even of the lewd and corrupt *Heathens*, that " they were " without excuſe". And of the *Jews* he ſays, that " every tranſgreſſion" (of *their inferior* law) " met with a juſt recompence of " reward. He that deſpiſed *Moſes his* law, " died without mercy".

And was it ſo, under the mere light of *nature*, and the guidance of bare *reaſon*? Was it ſo, under the earlier and fainter diſcoveries of God's will? I ſhall leave the *conſequence*, in the words of the ſame Apoſtle, to be well conſidered and improved by you all: " Of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe " ye, ſhall *he*" (that *chriſtian*) " be thought " worthy, who" (by a profligate life) " hath " trodden under foot the Son of God, and " hath counted the blood of the covenant " wherewith he was ſanctified as an unholy " thing, and hath done deſpite unto the Spirit " of Grace".

Wherefore remember " *Him* that hath ſaid, " vengeance is mine; I will repay, ſaith the " Lord".

To whom be honour and glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON XXVIII.

2 PETER iii. 11, 12.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and goodliness; looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God!

THE "day of God", and the "great "day of the Lord", are expressions so frequent, and delivered with such emphasis, throughout the sacred writings; that it is of the utmost concern to us to understand, and consider well, what they contain, as lessons for the direction and conduct of our christian life.

They denote either the *first*, or the *second* coming of Christ into the world. And the wonderful influences and effects of those great events, the changes and revolutions made, or

to be made, at either time of his appearing, are generally painted in the ſame ſublime and figurative language.

Thus the revolutions in the *Jewiſh ſtate* and religion; the deſtruction of their temple and polity, with the remarkable alterations in the other kingdoms of the world, conſequent upon the *firſt* coming of our Lord, and the progreſs of his religion and kingdom;--are pointed out by the lofty images of "turning the ſun into darkneſs, and the "moon into blood"; the "falling of the "ſtars from heaven", and "the ſhaking of "heaven and earth". Suns and moons and ſtars being uſed in that language, to ſignify the empires and religions, the governments and great officers, of this world.

In like manner, the *ſecond* and *laſt* appearance of Chriſt, as the *judge* of the world, and the *finiſher* of God's whole diſpenſation with mankind, is uſually diſplayed with ſome grand and diſtinguiſhing characters and circumſtances; ſuch as thoſe in this chapter of St. Peter, a part whereof I have now read to you:----In treating upon which paſſage, I ſhall be led to ſpeak of that illuſtrious event, "the day of God", and his judgment of the world, in the following method.

I. To lay before you the moſt ſtriking and material deſcriptions of this judgment, as they lie in the holy ſcriptures.

II. To collect the ſeveral intereſting truths, contained in them; to digeſt theſe into different propoſitions; and to ſhew you the order and reaſonableneſs of each.

And, III. to direct you to the inferences, and practical conſiderations, flowing from them; the better to convince you "what "manner of perſons ye ought to be, in all "holy converſation and godlineſs".

I. There would be no end of repeating all the numberleſs texts, wherein this glorious tranſaction of Chriſt's final judgment is repreſented, in the writings of the Prophets and Apoſtles. Be content, then, with a ſet of the plaineſt of them. I ſhall begin with that of the great Prophet Daniel. "Behold, "one like the ſon of man came with the "clouds of heaven: and there was given "Him dominion and glory and a kingdom; that all people, nations, and languages ſhould "ſerve Him". And again, more expreſsly; "Many" (that is, *all*) "of them that ſleep "in the duſt of the earth, ſhall awake; ſome "to everlaſting life, and ſome to ſhame and "everlaſting

"everlasting contempt. And they that be "wise, shall shine as the brightness of the "firmament; and they that turn many to "righteousness, as the stars for ever and "ever".

Our blessed Saviour follows the language of the ancient Prophets: "The Son of man "shall come in the clouds of heaven, in his "own glory, and in the glory of his Father, "and all the holy Angels with Him; and "He shall sit upon the throne of his glory: "and before him shall be gathered all nati-"ons: and He shall separate them one from "another: and He shall set the one on his "right hand, and the other on his left: and "the King shall say to them on his right "hand, come Ye blessed of my Father, in-"herit the kingdom prepared for you from "the foundation of the world: and to them "on his left hand He shall say, depart from "Me, Ye cursed, into everlasting fire pre-"pared for the Devil and his Angels".

St. Paul teaches us what he had learned from his Master, with some additional par-ticulars: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed "from heaven, with his mighty Angels; in "flaming fire; taking vengeance on them "that know not God, and obey not his Gos-

" pel, who ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſt-
" deſtruction". And in another place: " The
" Lord himſelf ſhall deſcend from heaven
" with the voice of the Archangel, and with
" the trump of God: and the dead in Chriſt
" ſhall riſe firſt; every man in his own or-
" der; then *we*" (that is thoſe *good chriſ-
tians*, who at that time are alive) " ſhall be
" changed, be cloathed with celeſtial bodies,
" and ſhall be caught up together with them,
" to meet the Lord in the air, and to be with
" Him for ever more.

St. Peter, in the verſe preceding the text, expatiates yet farther upon the wonders that are to be effected on this tremendous day: " The day of the Lord will come as a thief " in the night" (*ſuddenly* and *terribly* to the wicked) " in which the heavens ſhall " paſs away with a great noiſe, and the ele-
" ments ſhall melt with fervent heat; the
" earth alſo, and the works that are therein,
" ſhall be burnt up". And in the ſeventh verſe; " The heavens and the earth which
" *are now*, by the ſame word" (the word of God, who *drowned* the antient world) " are
" kept in ſtore, reſerved unto *fire* againſt the
" day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly
" men",

St. Jude comes next, and tells us (as our Saviour had partly done before) *who* are *then* to be judged and condemned together; namely, wicked *Angels*, and wicked *men*: "The "Angels which kept not their first estate, "but left their own habitation, He hath re- "served in everlasting chains under darkness, "unto the judgment of the great day". And then presently: "The Lord cometh with ten "thousands of his saints, to execute judg- "ment upon *all*".

Lastly; St. John, who closes up the whole Scriptures, the books of God, thus closes up also the whole account of the resurrection and last judgment: "I saw a *white*" (a *splendid* and *glorious*) "throne, and Him" (Christ) "that sat thereon; from whose face the "earth and the heaven fled away; and "there was no place for them"--- that is, the greatest of all revolutions in the world, was now brought to pass. "And I saw the "dead, small and great stand before God. "And the books were opened: and the dead "were judged out of the things which were "written in those books, according to their "works. And Death and *Hell*" (or the *Grave*) "were cast into the lake of fire"---

that

that is, they were *deſtroyed*---there was no more *dying*, now the *judgment* was come. "And the Devil that deceived men, and the "Beaſt, and the falſe Prophet" (all corrupters of true religion, all cruel tempters and ſeducers of others) "were caſt into the lake "of brimſtone, and ſhall be tormented day "and night for ever and ever".

This is a collection of the principal accounts we have, of this univerſal judgment of God. Let us now ſum them up, into the ſeveral truths, which we are to conclude from them.

II. It is no difficult matter that calls for deep criticiſm, to diſtinguiſh between what is merely *figurative ornament*, and what is *real*, and will be *literally fulfilled*, in the foregoing ſcriptures. For example----when our Lord is deſcribed as coming with the "*ſound of a* "*trumpet*" and "the *voice of an Archangel*"; as "*ſitting upon a throne* of judgment", and "*gathering all nations* before him";----theſe may be taken as familiar *alluſions* to the cuſtoms of *mankind*; whoſe rulers and judges are wont, in this or the like manner, to ſummon their people together, on any important occaſions.

The

The thought of *blowing the trumpet* is originally found in the *Prophet Iſaiah*; where, ſpeaking of the ſignal revolutions that ſhould happen in the world, in conſequence of the *appearance of the Meſſiah*, he ſays, "It ſhall "come to paſs in that day, that the *great* "*trumpet ſhall be blown*". And ſo, in St. John's Revelation, the ſeveral divine judgments upon the apoſtate Romiſh Church are exhibited under the image of the *ſeven trumpets*, and the *ſeven vials* of the wrath of God.

Again; when *books* are ſaid to be *opened*, and men to be *judged out of thoſe books*; it is but an apt and beautiful *ſimilitude*, borrowed from *human* courts of judicature; and means no more, than that, 'as the *written* laws of 'any country are the rule for an *earthly* judge 'to give ſentence by; ſo the *laws of the Goſ-'pel*, and the *word of God*, ſhall be the rule, 'whereby all men ſhall be tried at this *hea-'venly* aſſize'.

Thus far (as perhaps in ſome few *other* inſtances) the *figure* may take place; the better to impreſs upon our minds and imaginations, a lively idea of this grand event. But the remaining parts of theſe repreſentations contain *real truths*, and *facts* of the utmoſt moment.

I ſhall

I ſhall have time to remark ſuch of them only, as moſt nearly concerns us, for our *practical reflection*. The firſt of which is "the "heavenly *pomp* and *magnificence* of this arri-"val of our Judge, *with all the holy Angels*— "*with ten thouſands of his Saints*".

And that this may not be ſurmiſed by any one to be a ſolemn piece of needleſs pageantry, but be conſidered as infinitely ſuperior to the foppiſh parade of *human* grandeur and ambition; let me obſerve to you, how agreeable it is to the whole courſe of God's diſpenſations with mankind: how wiſely adapted to his gracious deſigns, and government of the whole rational world.

When man was firſt created, the ſacred ſcriptures ſeem plainly to intimate, that the great purpoſes and providences of the Creator towards him, were communicated to thoſe bleſſed Spirits, the attendants of the celeſtial court. *Job* informs you, that "they ſang, "and ſhouted for joy". And St. Peter ſpeaking of the *Goſpel diſpenſation*, ſays, "the "Angels deſired" (*took a pleaſure*) "to look "into it". The word, in the original, ſignifies to *ſtudy* and *contemplate*, to *pry* and look *earneſtly* into a thing. So "the *ancient Pro-*

"*phets*"

"*phets*" (as he tells us in the ſame place) "*inquired* and *ſtudied* and *ſearched diligently* "into the meaning and circumſtances of "what the Holy Spirit had revealed to them, "concerning Chriſt's ſufferings for man, and "the glories of his kingdom".

Moreover; the *Jewiſh Law* was delivered in the *preſence of theſe Angels*, and by *their miniſtration*. The Son of God, during his Miniſtry upon earth for reforming and redeeming mankind, was attended by them: they graced his birth; adorned his ſepulchre; and were his bright retinue in his triumphant aſcent into heaven. In fine; to the *Apoſtles* of Chriſt, *they* were the celeſtial guardians; and to *all* ſincere Chriſtians, they are "*miniſtring Spirits*", aſſiſting and enabling us to become "heirs of ſalvation".

Was it not expedient now, that this very "Hoſt of Heaven" ſhould be witneſſes of God's great and *final diſpenſation* to the World----*they* who had ſo long and conſtant a hand, under the Lord and Saviour and Judge, in the *adminiſtration* of it! Was it not fit that *they*, who have ſeen all the merciful *ſteps* of divine Providence over man, ſhould be ſpectators of the *completion* of it

in

in a judgment of impartial truth, juſtice and righteouſneſs? That *they*, who under the banner of God, had warred againſt *Satan* and the adverſaries of his kingdom, ſhould be eſtabliſhed for ever in their faith and loyalty, by ſeeing his laſt chains put upon them; by beholding them baniſhed into their miſerable and eternal abode?

In ſhort; wiſe it muſt needs be, that on this moſt intereſting occaſion, the *whole rational ſyſtem* ſhould be warned and edified and improved; by a ſight of the wretched effects of ſin and vice; by viewing the oppoſite and bleſſed fruits of virtue; the honour of the divine laws vindicated; and equity, mercy, and bounty ſhining forth in all the dealings of God with his moral creation. Thus, then, ought the future judgment to be *awful, conſpicuous*, and *ſolemn*.

2. The ſecond obſervation I make upon theſe ſcriptures is, "the *regular progreſs* of "this comprehenſive affair of the reſurrec-"tion and univerſal judgment; anſwering "to its happy or dreadful influences upon "virtuous or wicked men".

It is to be *ſudden* indeed, in the trueſt ſenſe of that word;---*amazing, terrible*, and

unexpected, to vitious Livers. But it is not to be *ſuddenly*, or in a *very ſhort time*, *finiſhed* and *completed*. It contains matters, that are to be *gradually* performed. It is not to be the work of a *ſingle day*; and might more properly be ſtiled the *time*, than the *day*, of judgment: as in ſeveral parts of ſcripture, it is called *thoſe days*, and *that time*.

There is to be a *double* reſurrection: a two-fold judgment is to be paſſed. "The dead "in Chriſt ſhall riſe firſt"; and, of *them*, "every man in his *own order*";--- meaning, moſt probably, that each ſhall have the preference of *time*, and the *firſt* advancement to bliſs and glory, in proportion to the *virtues* and *patient ſufferings* of his life.

And here, how welcome will be the change! how inexpreſſibly happy will be the conſequences! St. Paul has ſet them forth in a light ſo beautiful, as to ſurpaſs all human rhetoric; by comparing this ſummons of *good chriſtians to judgment*, with that of the *Jewiſh people at the giving of the law*. That manifeſtation of God's preſence at Mount Sinai, was accompanied with ſuch terrors, that Moſes himſelf tells them, "he feared "and quaked", at the very remembrance of it.

it. And ſo it might well be, with a people conſcious of their own guilt, and ſins againſt their Lawgiver. But how finely has the Apoſtle pictured the joyful difference! "*Ye* "are not come to the mount that burned "with fire, nor to blackneſs and darkneſs "and tempeſt: but *Ye* are come to *mount* "*Sion*, to the *heavenly Jeruſalem*, to the *city* "*of the living God*". You are to hear the trumpet indeed, but not to aſtoniſh and diſmay you; but to call you up to the "innumerable company of Angels", to the "ſpirits of juſt men made perfect"; to be incorporated into their godlike ſociety; to receive your Saviour, the mediator of the new covenant; to be clothed by Him with *ſpiritual* bodies, thoſe immortal vehicles that will enable you to riſe with him above the clouds, to "meet your Lord in the air, and "there to be for ever with the Lord". And thus will be fulfilled the words of St. John--"This is the *firſt* reſurrection: bleſſed and "holy are they, who ſhall have their part in "the *firſt* reſurrection".

If you would now ſee the contrary ſtate of things and perſons, on this deciſive day; look for it in the next obſervation.

3. According to the order of theſe judicial proceedings, when the righteous ſervants of the univerſal Lord, are thus happily diſpoſed of; "*then*", ſays St. Paul, "cometh the end, "when all enemies are to be put under his "feet", and are to riſe again to their *condemnation* and their *puniſhment*. When the former ſhall be lifted up from the earth, the latter will be left to periſh in its ruins. For "the earth, and the works that are therein, "ſhall be burnt up". To what *end* burnt up? Why, St. Peter tells you, "for the "judgment and perdition of ungodly men". "It is reſerved unto *fire*", for the ſame *uſe* to which the *flood of water* ſerved in the day of the *old rebellious world*. It was *then* deſtroyed: yet not ſo, as never more to become an *habitable world*: nor can we be ſure, that when the end of puniſhing the wicked by *fire* ſhall be fully accompliſhed, it may not again be reſtored, for ſome future good purpoſes of the all-wiſe providence, to the length whereof we are utterly unable to ſee.

From all that has been ſaid, two points of *inſtruction* may be drawn, for the cure of certain *prejudices*, which ſome men may labour under.

Firſt;

First; none of you needs to trouble himſelf with forming conjectures about the *particular place of Hell.* St. Peter has here marked it out to you. "This earth of ours "is to be ſet on fire: the virtuous are to be "firſt withdrawn from it: the wicked are "to remain in it, for their deſtruction, and "as the ſcene of their ſufferings".

Secondly; hence we learn alſo, that "neither the Devils nor ſinful men are, or ſhall "be, in the proper *Hell,* their laſt manſion of torment; nor the ſouls of the righteous in the proper Heaven; until this day "of judgment." This is the clear tenor of the ſcriptures I have cited, as well as of others without number; and was the prevailing opinion of the primitive chriſtians.

In the mean while, both the juſt and the unjuſt are in the hand of God, where let us leave them; the one under the aſſurance and diſmal foreſight of this day of vengeance and fiery indignation, the other under the delightful and infallible expectation of everlaſting reward and felicity.

Hitherto we have *ſpeculatively* ſurveyed what the ſcripture has taught us concerning this "day of the Lord". It is our next

and capital buſineſs, to turn our thoughts to ſuch *moral inferences* from the ſubject, as may affect *our practical life*:---which inferences are ſuggeſted to us, in the latter clauſe of the text: "if all theſe things are to be diſſolved, "*what manner of perſons* ought we to be in *all* "holy converſation and godlineſs"! But to purſue and enlarge upon this *application*, muſt be the argument of my next diſcourſe.

To the King Eternal,---

SERMON

SERMON XXIX.

2 PETER iii. 11, 12.

Seeing then that all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved, what manner of perſons ought ye to be, in all holy converſation and godlineſs; looking for, and haſting unto, the coming of the day of God!

THE *ſecond* coming of Chriſt to *judge* the world, which the holy ſcriptures ſtile the *day*, and the *great day*, of the Lord, is what I purpoſed to diſcourſe upon, from theſe words. And I have already, as the *firſt part* of the method I laid down, collected together and ſet before you, the principal paſſages of ſcripture, that were intended to deſcribe the moſt material circumſtances of this awful tranſaction. From theſe I gathered, and digeſted into ſeveral articles, ſome of the moſt important truths reſulting from them:

them; and ſhewed you the order and propriety of each:---ſuch as,

1. The *magnificence* and *ſolemnity* of this appearance of Chriſt our Judge, eſcorted by all the Hoſt of Heaven.

2. The *regular progreſs* of this great event of our reſurrection and judgment, anſwering to the happy or dreadful *effects* it is deſigned to produce on the minds and conditions of virtuous or wicked men.

3. And particularly, the final and concluding part of the ſcene; "the burning of this "earth of ours by fire".

III. It remains now, as the buſineſs of the *preſent* diſcourſe, that I direct your thoughts to the laſt words of the text, comprehending the *practical uſes* to which we ſhould apply the foregoing truths---- "What *manner of* "*perſons* ought ye to be, in all *holy converſation and godlineſs*"! To take them, then, in their order.

1. Conſider "whether it be not worth "your while, and ought not to be matter of "your cloſeſt attention, frequently to call to "mind the *dread ſolemnity* of the day of your "judgment". And if ever you *do* think upon

on it, with the ſeriouſneſs the ſubject claims from you; tell me, in the truth of your hearts, if *theſe two reflections* do not immediately ſtrike and affect you. Firſt; "the "ſhame, reproach, and infamy, that awaits "a diſſolute and immoral life".

Every man, that has not quenched every ſpark of his rational nature, cannot but feel in himſelf a ſenſe of *diſgrace*, treading cloſe upon every baſe principle and baſe action. He cannot but ſee, what a proviſion the good Creator has made againſt every ſpecies of wickedneſs, by implanting in us a paſſion, peculiarly calculated to reſtrain us from it.

Shame is as natural to the mind, as fear, or love, or joy, or any *other* affection whatever. And though a wicked action were ſuppoſed exempt from all poſſibility of diſcovery and puniſhment, from thoſe *about us*; yet the *ſenſe of it* afflicts and burns us *inwardly*: and nothing can ever *extinguiſh* that ſenſe, but inveterate habit, and a long-vitiated taſte.

If, then, vice and ſhame be thus cemented together, even in *preſent nature*; how will they appear, at the great day of God's judgment! *Then* will this *diſgrace* (like all the

other

other evils we have wilfully brought upon ourſelves) be let looſe againſt us without all reſtraint; without any object, to divert, aſſwage, or interrupt it. You will *then* have no *tender-hearted friend* to put the kind interpretation, the charitable conſtruction, upon your paſt life; no *wicked neighbours*, or *lewd companions*, to help you out, and drive away your ſhame, with their wonted merriment, or complaiſance, or ridicule. But your trial will be all *ſolemn*, *earneſt*, and *impartial*. God, your all-knowing Judge, is too wiſe to be impoſed upon: Angels and virtuous Spirits are too good, to ſhew any favour to malicious and unrepented wickedneſs.

Again; "does not this conſideration "awaken you to a clear ſight of the *folly* as "well as *guilt* of all *private* and *ſecret* vices"? It was the precept of an *Heathen man*, that proves a reproach to many a *chriſtian*--- "Of "all mankind, reverence *thyſelf* the moſt---- meaning, that 'we ſhould bluſh to do any 'thing *alone and by ourſelves*, which in the 'face of others we ſhould be confounded at'. For the diſhonour that cleaves inſeparably to every ſinful action, is the ſame to the *heart*

and

and *conſcience*, as if ten thouſand ſpectators ſtood ready to give their opinions about it. But behold what an infinite *difference* there is, between the ſtage of this world, and the theatre of God's laſt judgment!----Where it will ſignify nothing, whether your crimes have been artfully covered with the veil of night, or have impudently walked in the noon day. For "God ſhall judge the ſe-"crets of men by Jeſus Chriſt, and ſhall "bring to light the hidden things of dark-"neſs".

Come out therefore from your fooliſh retirement! What ſafety is there in ſuch poor hypocriſy and obſcurity! Live in the ſecret chamber, and learn to behave in the cloſet, as if the doors were all thrown open about you. Accuſtom yourſelf to think and ſpeak and act, as if there were a window in your breaſt: ſince God, you know, will judge the very heart that lodges there. "All things "are naked and open to the eyes of *Him*, "with whom we have to do": not only ſo, but they will one day be ſpread open to thoſe very eyes of *men*, from which you now ſo weakly labour to ſkreen and to conceal them.

Let

Let us paſs on to the ſecond obſervation; namely, "the directly oppoſite effects, the "bleſſed or woful influences, of this intereſt-"ing event, upon virtuous or ſinful perſons". Let us view theſe effects according to the accounts of holy ſcripture, with relation either to the *bodies* or the *ſouls* of men; and draw our proper leſſons of behaviour from them.

If we hearken only to the *analogy and reaſon of things*, we ſhall be convinced, that a *body*, deſigned for the manſions of heavenly light and bliſs, muſt needs be exalted, and wonderfully changed from what it is in its preſent earthly ſtate. How will it then comfort and lift up the heart of a ſincere chriſtian, to hear the voice of that gracious Power, which "ſhall change his vile body, "that it may be like unto his Saviour's glo-"rified body"? But at the ſame time, how ought this to remind us all, of the religious duty we ſhould *now* begin to exerciſe towards theſe bodies of ours; by not ſuffering "ſin "to reign in them, ſo as to obey it in the "luſts thereof"; by "mortifying our mem-"bers that are upon the earth, fornication,

"and

"and all uncleanneſs"; by purifying with all imaginable care theſe mortal veſſels, that are intended to be hereafter the veſſels of honour and immortality. And what reſiſtleſs evidence, and force of argument, do theſe chriſtian and ſacred commands carry in them! For how incongruous would it be, to have *that* body preſented to God, as a fit member of the community of his ſpotleſs and glorified Saints, which you have all along been polluting with ſordid vices, and abominable gratifications. As if fleſh and blood, corrupt as you *make* it, and corrupt as you *leave* it, could ever poſſibly "inherit the "kingdom of God"! Oh no! If ever you hope to ſee theſe earthly tabernacles turned into ſhining temples for your celeſtial habitation; it muſt be by a generous and manly conqueſt of their unruly paſſions, and a conſcientious regulation of all their emotions, appetites, and deſires. Whereas, if you defile and debaſe them by low indulgencies; if you enſlave and fetter them to earth, and earthly pleaſures; never can they be worthy or able to ſoar upwards; never can they mount towards heaven, to "meet the Lord in the "air, and to be ever with the Lord".

In

In like manner, if the happineſs of our *better part*, the *ſoul* and *mind*, is at that great day to conſiſt in the perfection of its *rational faculties*; in the enlargement of its underſtanding its progreſs in righteouſneſs, and the favour and bleſſing of its Creator;----ought not theſe conſiderations to make us labour to be prepared for this advancement in felicity; by beginning *now* to cultivate the virtues on which it is to be built; by ſetting out, and travelling forward, towards the heavenly life, in which we are *then* to be completed; by growing and improving in that love of God and his commandments, in that faith in Him and reliance upon Him which will endear us to Him; and in all that juſtice and charity to each other, which will render us fit for the company of Angels, amongſt whom peace and love for ever dwell. This is the "manner of perſons we ought to "be", in the ſenſe of our Apoſtle. Such a life as this, will cauſe us to look with rapture on the proſpect of this "day of God"----to hope for it, and to wiſh for it---to wiſh that we could quicken, and haſten on, its approach.

What

What has been ſaid, calls upon me to turn theſe conſiderations to the contrary caſe of *profligate* and impenitent men, in this day of righteous indignation; and thence to draw them out a perſuaſive to a timely repentance. If ever you *look at all before you*, and do not abſolutely *make a mock* of the notion of a *future exiſtence*; what, think you, can be the ſtate, or where the place, of your reſidence and abode? A ſtate of *reſt*, like that of the "people of God", it cannot, in the courſe of nature, poſſibly be. The *ſentiments* and *habits* and *diſpoſitions*, you carry *with* you and *in* you, will no way admit of of it. Fiſh may as well live in woods, and men converſe and breathe at the bottom of the ocean; tranquility and confuſion, love and hatred, diſcord and harmony, may as ſoon become one, and aſſociate together; as ever a vicious mind can enjoy the pleaſures of a virtuous ſociety, or the refined delights of pure and exalted ſouls.

But moreover: what can be the *place*, appropriated and aſſigned to ſuch a ſet of creatures, as you will then be found to be? If *reaſon* can be heard, *Heaven* cannot receive you.

Advancement in *rational perfections*, cannot belong to you. All good and wiſe men take *then* their final leave of you--- to "enter "into the joy of their Lord". Only the *Earth*, indeed, will be left to you: but, if the word of God ſhould prove true; this very "*Earth*" (the only paradiſe you have loved, or ſought after) "and all that is "therein, ſhall be burnt up"----nay burnt up, for *your puniſhment and perdition*. Mark, here, the wiſe and terrible proviſion of Divine Providence, againſt rebellious men! Remember it, all ye that forget God! "*This* "world, your ſole *uſe* of which is, to make "it the ſcene of your debauchery and vani-"ties, of your revels, iniquity, and impiety, "will one day be turned for you into the "horrid theatre of your torment, the habita-"tion of your miſery and deſpair". Wherein all and every one ſhall feel and ſuffer, according to his *temper* and his *works*: but "mighty men" (the Great Ones in lewdneſs and oppreſſion) "ſhall be mightily tor-"mented".

And now, let us all ſtand a while, and give room to a ſerious reflection! Is it in your

your power to pay the leaſt attention to ſuch a future cataſtrophy, without having your *love of this world* damped and abated; without humbling your idea of its gaieties and and riches and grandeur? Or muſt it *always* be ſo, that a world, every moment *paſſing away*, each day drawing on to rubbiſh and deſtruction, ſhall fill the hearts, and dazzle the affections, of rational and immortal creatures? That a man, pretending to be wiſe, ſhall ſell all that he has; ſell his conſcience, pawn his honour, and forfeit his innocence, to purchaſe an eſtate, which, as ſoon almoſt as he is entered upon it, muſt drop and vaniſh from under his feet? Is here no argument, to diſſuade you from drudging for the world? As if your houſes were to continue for ever, and your dwellings and your pomp were to reach to the height of heaven, and the ſucceſſion of the ſons to the fathers were to be as the days of eternity! Striving for things, without looking to the *end* of them! Not conſidering, that a world like this, ſo changeable and tranſitory, could never be meant, ought never to be thought on, as our fixed and permanent home, but another and a better to be provided for; and,

above all, that you have good things of it bestowed upon you with this *memorable condition*--- "that if you *abuse them*, you are to "*perish* in the *ruins* of them".

3. I have but *one* topic more to bring your recollection, under the present head; namely, that "this fire, with whose fervent heat "the very *elements shall melt*, and the earth "and the works that are therein shall be "burnt up, is to be the *instrument of punish-* "*ment* of wicked Angels and wicked men".

What an apprehension does this give us, of *the terrors of that punishment!*--First, with respect to those reprobate Spirits, those Apostates from heaven, who make the memory of their former happy situation a spur, *not* to relenting for their folly, as it naturally ought to be, but to envying the good of all their fellow subjects;----who have so long been the promoters and the precedents of vice to the whole rational world, have been tempting all others into it, and to the utmost of their power destroying the happiness of God's creatures, wich is the glory of his creation. When all things therefore shall come to be adjusted, on this day of universal recompence;----for the mischiefs they have been

contriving

contriving through a train of ſo many thouſand years, and the cruel hand they have lent to the ruin of ſo many myriads of ſouls, Bleſſed God! what muſt be the vengeance, the blackneſs of darkneſs, that is preparing for them!

And this ſame unquenchable fire is intended alſo, it ſeems, for as many of *us*, as follow the example, and fight under the banner, of this Adverſary of God's kingdom. But then, God will appear to be ſupremely juſt and equitable in *this laſt*, as in all his *other* judgments. This puniſhment, though the ſame in *kind*, will not be the ſame in *degree*, with that of the *revolted Angels*. It will be (and *that* is dreadful enough) *in proportion only* to that *pride of your hearts*, wherein you imitate this *Lucifer*, who firſt fell becauſe He was *proud*, and was *loſt* becauſe He would not ſtoop again and repent. It will be in proportion to ſuch *fraud* and *diſhoneſty* and *falſhood* in your *dealings*, whereby you become the children of *Him*, the *Father of lies*. Laſtly; it will be in ſad proportion to the wicked pains you have taken, and the infernal arts you have employed, to corrupt, ſeduce, and draw each other aſide, into in-

temperance, profaneneſs, and licentiouſneſs. *Here* you put on the *expreſs image*, every act gives you the *ſtrongeſt reſemblance*, of that accurſed Being, whoſe names, in holy ſcripture, ſignify *Deceiver*, *Tempter*, *Enemy*, and *Deſtroyer*.

It is time now to finiſh this ſubject: and let me do it with earneſtly exhorting you, that by none of theſe or the like tranſgreſſions, you would be ſo deſperately inconſiderate, as to add fuel to your fire, and pain to your damnation! But rather let *us all*, in due ſeaſon, lay hold on the grace that is offered to us, and the pardon that is promiſed to the ſincere reformation of our ſins that are paſt. That ſo this day of eternal doom may not "come upon us as a thief in the night"; but we may be found in the number of thoſe faithful ſervants, who wait with joy for the arrival of their Lord, and for the "unfading "crown of glory which He will *then* confer "on all them that love his appearing".

To him be glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XXX.

1 TIMOTHY vi. 1.

That the name of God, and his doctrine be not blaſphemed.

IT is common in all languages, for the *names* and *titles* of perſons, frequently to denote the perſons *themſelves*. And as in our own tongue, the King's *Majeſty* ſignifies the King himſelf; ſo, in ſcripture phraſe, to glorify, to praiſe, or to blaſpheme the *Name* of God, is to do the one or the other to the Divine Being *himſelf*.

To *blaſpheme* any thing or perſon, is to raiſe a falſe, malicious, and ſcandalous *report* of it;--to miſrepreſent it, and bring it under an ill fame, and an ill character, whether by words or deeds. Thus thoſe Jews, who de-

clared our Saviour's miracles to have been wrought by the power of Satan, and not of God, are ſaid to have "*blaſphemed* that Holy "Spirit", by whoſe gracious influence they were performed. And ſo Naboth the Jeſreelite was accuſed of "*blaſpheming* God and the "King"; that is, of uttering ſome expreſſions, which tended to leſſen the honour of God, and to blaſt the reputation of the Prince.

Agreeably to all which, when *Chriſtians* are exhorted to take care, that the "name "of God and his doctrine be not *blaſphemed* "by their manners and converſation"; the meaning is, that 'no *diſcredit* be brought upon 'the religion of God and Chriſt', that 'no 'unworthy *notion* and *opinion* of it be imbi-'bed, and ſpread among mankind, through 'the imprudences, or the vices, of thoſe who 'profeſs it'.

St. Paul, in the paſſage before us, gives this caution *in particular* to "ſervants that "were under the yoke"; that is, to ſuch chriſtians as were *ſlaves* to *Heathen Maſters* at the time of their converſion. He charges theſe men to "count their maſters worthy "of all honour"; to continue to ſerve them with all fidelity; and not to imagine that

chriſtianity

chriſtianity releaſed any man from his ſervitude, or diſſolved any of his natural or civil obligations---an imagination that could not fail to do injury to themſelves, and be a ſcandal to their holy Calling.

And here we ſhould do well to obſerve, before we proceed any farther, that "there is "no claſs or degree of people in the whole "chriſtian world, but what have a great "ſhare, and ought to have a conſciencious "concern, in either promoting the *glory* of "God, or in avoiding ſuch behaviour as may "tend to *blaſpheme* his name, and caſt a *re-* "*proach* upon his ſacred word and revelati-"on". From the King upon the throne to the loweſt labourer in the field, and the humbleſt ſervant in the houſe, there is a duty and a care incumbent, and a ſtrict account to be given, by what diſcourſe and actions and demeanour they either adorn or diſgrace, either recommend or ſcandalize, the doctrine of their Creator and Saviour.

In this extenſive view, then, I ſhall treat the Apoſtle's advice; as reſpecting the conduct of chriſtians of all orders and denominations: and, as I go along, ſhall apply the

argument more closely to *ourselves*, under these *three* characters.

I. As christians in *general*.

II. As *reformed* christians.

III. As a *particular Church*, or branch, of such a Reformation.

I. I take for granted that every man, who is *sincere* in his profession of any religion, has some tenderness for its credit and interest; and *wishes*, and by all honest means would *endeavour*, to propagate the knowledge and privileges and blessings of it, among the rest of mankind. True piety to God, belongs alike to *all* men; and the benefits attending it, ought to be desired and prayed for by every good man, for the glory of God. In this great work the Apostles of Christ spent their labours, and laid down their lives: and the truly primitive Christians ran all hazards, and endured all pains, to carry on and perfect it. And long would that blessed work have gone forward, had it not been for the two notorious evils, which *then* soon gave, and still *now* give (and God only knows how long they will *continue* to give) a fatal check to the happy progress of it. The evils I have

my

my eye upon, you may all eaſily *know*, and we have all *felt* them;---namely, the "perverting the *doctrines*, and corrupting the "*morals*, of chriſtianity". For as ſoon as ever Chriſtians began to broach, and maintain, and contend about, ſeveral things, that were no part of their religion; that were not to be found in any page of their Goſpel; nay were, many of them, contradictory to the very rule and ſtandard, to the whole temper and ſpirit, of *that* Goſpel; alas, their *practices* quickly became as bad as their *principles!* and they behaved as ill to *one another*, as an *Heathen* or a *Jew* could be ſuppoſed to do to any of *them*. The world preſently caught the prejudice. It was obvious for the bulk of mankind to follow the current and popular ſentiment---- "to judge of mens *reli*-"*gion*, by what the *men themſelves are*". Thus ſunk the honour of our chriſtian cauſe in the *eaſtern* quarters of the world; and God, in righteous judgment, ſuffered it *ſtill* to ſink; till his name and his doctrine were *completely blaſphemed* by the Mahometan Superſtition, in thoſe original chriſtian churches, And, at laſt, the grand Apoſtacy in our

weſtern

weſtern churches, put an end to all hopes of any reception of the Goſpel among the *Turks*, or of any converſion of the *Jews*;--who gegenerally form their idea of *chriſtianity* from the abominations of *Popery*. For the infallibility of the Pope, the worſhip of images, the praying to Saints, the impudence and impiety of abſolutions, and the infinite nonſenſe of tranſubſtantiation;----are all ſuch a *ſtumbling block* to every *Turk* of common underſtanding, to every *Jew*, and indeed to every *mortal* that has any apprehenſion of the nature of God, or of the nature of man, or of the reaſon of things; that it is no wonder the *Turk abhors* the name of Chriſt, and the *Jew* never ceaſes to *blaſpheme* it.

And accordingly we ſee, by the writings of Abarbanel and other eminent Rabbins, that their arguments, or rather *reproaches*, againſt the *chriſtian revelation*, are all leveled againſt the *ſcheme of popery*.

Then again, the cruel and perſecuting ſpirit of that church, together with the deteſtable ſins, and even encouragements to ſin, in the Clergy as well as Laity of that communion, are ſo flagrant; that I cannot be

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in the leaſt aſtoniſhed at the relation given by a very honeſt and learned Biſhop of our own church, who laboured much in the converſion of *Jews*, and for that purpoſe entered into an intimate friendſhip and correſpondence with many of them.

He tells us of *two* conſiderable perſons of that perſuaſion; one of whom could never be moved to liſten at all to any change; declaring "that he verily thought, if he were "to turn *chriſtian*, the debaucheries of Italy "would make him aſhamed to own that "name": the *other*, a Spaniſh Jew, *pretended* to be a convert; and openly boaſted, "that "he had *now* met with a religion, where-"in he had nothing to do, but to tell his "beads and indulge his vices". The blaſphemy indeed was like that of a *Jew*; but the *occaſion* of it was given by thoſe, who term themſelves the *infallible chriſtians*.

II. Thus has our chriſtian vocation ſuffered long and undeſerved diſgrace, from the depraved doctrines, the idolatrous worſhip, and the violent practices, of the Apoſtate Church.

When a *Reformation* from theſe errors and abuſes was ſet on foot, much better

things

things might have been expected. When the Scriptures were to be embraced as the ſole rule of *Faith*, the world might well hope to ſee a final concluſion of all ſpurious *traditions*, and arbitrary *interpretations*, and *human inventions*. Inſtead of numberleſs ſuperſtitions and an heap of idle and ſenſeleſs formalities, there was the pleaſing proſpect of rational piety, virtue, and purity; and a worſhip of God, in Spirit and in Truth. And, God be praiſed, a great deal of this good was actually done; and many a ſincere and devout chriſtian reaped proportional light and bleſſing from it.

And had the Reformers proceeded upon the ſame maxims, on which they firſt ſet out;--had they continued to teach and to enforce thoſe maxims, and to order and govern their churches by them;---had they bravely ſhaken off the tyranny of *Rome*, and *then* exerciſed none but ſpiritual and chriſtian power *themſelves*;----had they, after forſaking the pretended infallible Guide, conſciencioufly followed the clear and undoubted expreſſes of God's own word;----had they ſeparated from that domineering communion, and taken care *not* to divide and ſubdivide among themſelves,

themſelves, *not* to impoſe upon each other, and quarrel and perſecute their brethren for not ſubmitting to *their* determinations:---in one word, had they, upon diſcovering and withdrawing from the crimes and corruptions of the revolted church, practiſed the genuine virtues and graces of the everlaſting Goſpel;---what an amiable ſimplicity, what reſiſtleſs evidence, would the *native* chriſtianity, the *truly reformed* church of Chriſt, have appeared to carry in it? How muſt its doctrines and laws and diſcipline have charmed the eyes, and gained the eſteem and admiration, of all that beheld their noble influence upon the lives and manners of its profeſſors?

But when once the love of *temporal power* began to mix itſelf with the love of *ſpiritual duties*, and by degrees to gather ground upon it; when Proteſtants were contented with abandoning the abſurd tenets of Popery, without departing from the practical vices of the Papiſt; what a figure muſt their *reformation* be conceived to make, in the ſight either of true friends, or intelligent enemies? How ſhould it be likely to attract the regard of an *Heathen*, or to ſoften the prejudices of a *Jew*; or, with either of them, to preſerve the

the "name of God and His doctrine, from "being evil ſpoken of and blaſphemed"?

III. Let us go one ſtep farther, and apply all this to *ourſelves and our own* church, as a particular and capital branch of the reformation abovementioned.

I believe I may fairly ſay, that we have as few, if not fewer errors in our national and eſtabliſhed ſyſtem of religion, than any other of our Siſter Proteſtant Communities: and it is to be hoped that much light and learning is diffuſed, to rectify (in due *time* and *manner*) ſuch as may be preſumed *ſtill to remain*. But if, in ſpite of all theſe advantages, we have *as many*, eſpecially if we have *more* and *greater* vices than any of our neighbours; the certain inference will be, that we are in a condition far worſe than the very worſt of them, and ſhall be found to have given more juſt occaſion to the enemies of God, to blaſpheme his name, and to ſcandalize his doctrine. For with what face or confidence can we ſtile ourſelves the "ſtrength and glo-"ry of the Proteſtant Reformation", while our ambition and luxury, our luſts and open licentiouſneſs, ſhew us to be the very ſame wicked creatures, which thoſe wicked doc-

trines

trines would have taught us to be, and of which we pretended to be ſo conſciencioufly fearful? And what an *inviting argument* would it be to a plain honeſt man of the Romiſh Faith, to inform him, that you forſook the communion of *one* church, corrupt and *unchriſtian*; to enter into *another*, whoſe members live and act worſe than the unenlightened *Heathens!* That you have been fining your principles from the pollutions of *other people*, and refining again *among yourſelves* and from *each other*, and yet at laſt are arrived to no higher pitch of virtue and real religion, than the deluded chriſtians whoſe errors you have renounced; and are utterly incapable of anſwering the reproaches of *any one* of thoſe who continue ſtrangers to Chriſt, and revilers of his doctrine!

There *may be*, and I make no queſtion there *are*, a great number of our looſe, and even profligate Livers; on whom though neither duty nor intereſt can prevail to become ſober and virtuous, yet they have no abſolute and ſettled *averſion to what is good*, nor wiſh to ſee the credit and honour of chriſtianity *loſt*, and *baniſhed out of the world*. They would not blaſpheme Chriſt *themſelves*, nor take pleaſure in hearing *others* do it.

But how remote is this from being *innocent*, how wide from being able to plead *not highly guilty!* How vain and inconſiſtent is it, to pretend to ſeparate the *cauſe* from its certain and neverfailing *effects?* How can you allow yourſelves to forget, that notorious *actions* will always draw down more infamy both upon your characters and your profeſſion, than *mere words* can poſſibly do? The ignorant and unbelieving world will evermore eſtimate the value of any *religion*, by the *lives* of the men that *hold* and *entertain* it. And though your *lips* were never ſo cloſely ſealed, and your *tongues* never ſo ſtrongly tied up, from abuſing the name of God, and his holy Goſpel; your *vicious practices* will bring forth the plaineſt ſcandal, and ſpeak the loudeſt blaſphemy.

Suffer me therefore, I beſeech you, to repeat, and moſt earneſtly to preſs upon your hearts, the juſt obſervation I made at my entrance upon this ſubject. St. Paul, as I *there* told you, inſiſts that the very chriſtian *ſervants*, even *ſlaves under the yoke*", have it in their *power* (and he lays it with great weight upon their *conſciences*) either to ſerve and glorify God by a *peaceable* and *faithful* and *dutiful*

dutiful behaviour, or to throw odium and ſhame upon his divine word and doctrine by a *rude* and *rebellious* one.

And if ſuch be the caſe with the weakeſt and leaſt important of our ſpecies, how can any chriſtian of *ſuperior* rank and influence, imagine himſelf to be indifferent and unconcerned in ſo momentous an affair?

How can the chriſtian *magiſtrate* behold unmoved, and hear in patient ſilence, the oaths and imprecations, the lewdneſs obſcenity and iniquity, of the people that are about him, and under him---without *rebuke and reſtraint*----without execution of *legal puniſhment*----without knowing and *feeling* that, through *his* neglect in the *grand office of all others*, the name of God, and his ſupreme Authority, is thus publickly affronted and blaſphemed!

Or what part does that Great Man, or that Gentleman act towards his church and his country; by whoſe indecent and unguarded freedoms, his Inferiors and Dependents can ſcarce poſſibly avoid learning both to think lightly, and to talk irreverently, of the religion of their Maker and Redeemer?

To include you *all* in this admonition. Let not the meaneſt, the pooreſt wretch amongſt us, harbour a thought "that he can "be profane, or drunken, or debauched, by "*himſelf alone*, and without *all relation to* "*others*". Alas! You live in ſociety, and are a *part* of it, as much as the higheſt Lord in the land. *Your* vices, as well as *his* (like the infection of a peſtilence) reach the eyes, the ears, and at length the hearts, of thoſe who dwell around you. Good people are grieved and offended at you; ſtrangers are amazed at you; and the enemies of God rejoice over you, and are confirmed and hardened in their immorality and infidelity. And, whether you *deſign* it or no, you damp all veneration for ſobriety (and for every thing elſe that ought to be ſacred) in your children, in your families, in your neighbourhood; to the ruin, as far as in *you* lies, of your whole country!

To cloſe up all. What ſhall we have to reply, in behalf of this church and kingdom of ours; ſhould ſuch a ſevere queſtion be aſked about *us*, as was aſked by our Saviour concerning the *men of his own time and nation*---- "Who they were, that muſt anſwer

"for

" for the blood of all the Prophets that had " been ſhed, from the blood of righteous " Abel to the laſt Prophet that was ſlain ?

If, I ſay, it ſhould in like manner be demanded " Who *they* are are, that muſt be " anſwerable for all the contempt of ſerious " piety---for all the objections and blaſphe- " mies that have been raiſed againſt the name " of God and his doctrine, ſince the happy " change and light of the Reformation--ſince " the time of our deliverance from popiſh " ignorance, and tyrannic power---ſince the " days of thoſe divine providences that have " been demonſtrated in all our victories and " ſignal ſucceſſes, and in the unſpeakable " bleſſings we enjoy, of knowledge and learn- " ing, of peace and ſecurity" ;----what muſt be the reply, but that very one, given by our heavenly Maſter: " verily, I ſay unto you, all " this ſhall be required of this generation".

To God only wiſe.---

THE END.

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